NATION

16,000 Indians replace Palestinian workers in Israel

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BUSINESS

Mkts dip as foreign fund outflows persist

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SPORTS

Osaka wins first match of the season

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 31 DECEMBER 2024 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 28 JUMADA II, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 335 | Pages: 8

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Prashant, 700 booked for students' protest in Bihar

Kishore faced flak for abandoning students during lathicharge

PATNA, 30 DEC

The Bihar Police has filed a case against poll strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor and others for allegedly instigating the students' protest being held by Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) aspirants in Patna's Gandhi Maidan. A political row erupted after Bihar police lathicharged students demanding a re-examination of the recruitment test.

Kishor has been charged along with 700-odd unidentified protesters.

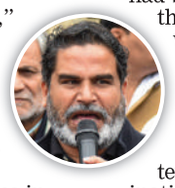
Meanwhile, Kishor on Monday claimed to have learnt that "thousands of crores of rupees have changed hands" for posts to be filled up by the Bihar PSC exam, cancellation of which is being demanded by many candidates.

The former close aide of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also expressed dismay over refusal of his ex-mentor to "utter a single word" on the stir which has been going on for nearly two weeks.

Recalling the previous day's demonstration which was addressed by him, Kishor said till about 4 PM, he kept telling the candidates to look forward to a statement from the chief minister who might take a stand that could break the stalemate.

Aspirants during a protest against the alleged paper leak and irregularities in the BPSC 70th Integrated Combined Competitive Examination (CCE), in Patna on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

"But he kept mum," Kishor claimed.



Nearly 5 lakh candidates had appeared at more than 900 centres across the state for the Combined Competitive Exams.

At one of the exam centres in Patna, hundreds of candidates boycotted the test alleging that question papers were "leaked".

This was refuted by the Bihar Public Service Commission, which saw a "conspiracy" to get the exams cancelled at work, even though re-examination had been ordered for more than 10,000 candidates who had been assigned the Bapu Pariksha Parisar, which was at the centre of the controversy.

The protesters' contention is that re-examination for a small section of candidates would militate against the principle of a level-playing field and, hence, the entire exam should be cancelled and held afresh.

Kishor, who was of the view that "corruption was rampant in BPSC", however, made it clear that he did not want to push further the scandalous charge he had heard of.

Jan Suraaj Party founder has been accused of "running away" from the site of protest by RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, who also called him Nitish's B team; while Neeraj Kumar, a senior leader of the chief minister's JD(U), called him a "political fugitive".

The JNUSU held a demonstration outside the JD(U) office to demand Nitish Kumar's resignation. —*PTI*

NAIDU WORTH ₹931 CR

Chandrababu Naidu and Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: X**

Naidu richest CM, Siddaramaiah 3rd & Didi poorest: ADR

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

A recent report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) has highlighted the stark wealth disparity among Indian chief ministers, with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu topping the list as the richest, boasting assets exceeding Rs 931 crore. Conversely, West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee is identified as the least affluent chief minister, holding assets valued at just Rs 15 lakh.

The ADR report states that the average asset value per chief minister within the states and union territories is Rs 52.59 crore. For the fiscal year 2023-2024, India's per capita net national income stands at approximately Rs 1,85,854, while the average self-declared income of a chief minister is reported at Rs 13,64,310, which is around 7.3 times the national per capita income.

According to the report, the combined assets of the 31 chief ministers amount to Rs 1,630 crore. Arunachal Pradesh's Pema Khandu ranks as the second richest chief minister, with assets of over Rs 332 crore, followed by Karnataka's Siddaramaiah, whose assets exceed Rs 51 crore.

However, Khandu also leads in liabilities, totalling Rs 180 crore. On the other end of the spectrum, Jammu and Kashmir's Omar Abdullah is the second poorest with assets of Rs 55 lakh, while Pinarayi Vijayan's assets are valued at Rs 118 crore.

The report also reveals that 42 per cent of chief ministers have declared criminal cases against themselves, and only two out of the 31 are women. —*PTI*

Farmers' Punjab bandh disrupts life for 9 hours

CHANDIGARH, 30 DEC

Normal life was hit across Punjab on Monday due to a nine-hour 'bandh' called by farmers protesting against the Centre for their various demands including a legal guarantee of a minimum support price for their crops.

Rail and road traffic were severely impacted, and many commercial establishments remained closed.

From 7am to 4pm, farmers staged sit-ins and blockades on major roads and highways in cities such as Patiala, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ferozepur, Bathinda, and Pathankot, causing significant disruptions for commuters. The bandh was called by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha in response to the government's inaction regarding their demands.

The shutdown also served to show solidarity with farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on a hunger strike for 35 days at the Khanauri border protest site. At the Dhareri Jattan Toll Plaza, farmers orchestrated a sit-in that hampered traffic on the Patiala-Chandigarh National Highway.

In Amritsar, numerous farmers gathered at Golden Gate, where police facilitated travel for stranded foreign tourists by arranging auto rickshaws to the Golden Temple.

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher reassured reporters that essential services and emergencies were exempt from the disruptions, allowing those with urgent travel needs, such as airport transfers or job interviews, to proceed unhindered. —*PTI*

≫≫More on Page 4

Farmers block a road during the statewide bandh called as part of their ongoing protest at Punjab borders, in Amritsar on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

Ex-US Prez Jimmy Carter dies at 100

WASHINGTON, 30 DEC

Jimmy Carter, the 39th President of the United States and a distinguished statesman, has died peacefully in his home in Plains, Georgia at the age of 100. Carter, who served from 1977 to 1981, holds the record as the longest-lived President in US history.

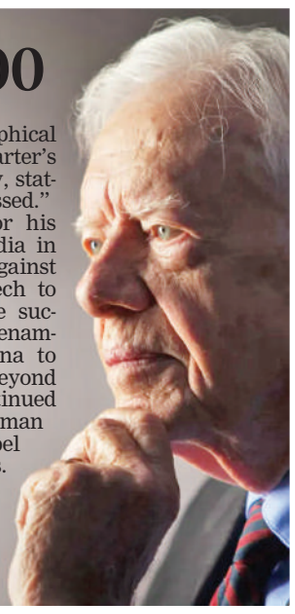
In a statement, President Joe Biden expressed that the world has lost an "extraordinary leader, statesman, and humanitarian."

Carter is survived by his children Jack, Chip, Jeff, and Amy, as well as 11 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. His son Chip described him as a "hero" to those who believe in peace and human rights. Carter, a Democrat, had been receiving hospice care since February 2023 after several hospital stays. Biden praised Carter's decades-long commitment to eradicating disease, promoting free elections, and advocating for the underprivileged. Donald Trump acknowledged their philosophical differences but recognised Carter's genuine love for the country, stating he would be "greatly missed."

Carter is remembered for his groundbreaking visit to India in 1978, where he advocated against authoritarianism in a speech to the Indian parliament. The success of this visit led to the renaming of a village in Haryana to 'Carterpuri' in his honour. Beyond his presidency, Carter continued to champion peace and human rights, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. President Biden has announced a state funeral scheduled for 9 January in Washington. —*PTI*

"Deeply saddened by the passing of former USA President Mr. Jimmy Carter. A statesman of great vision, he worked tirelessly for global peace and harmony. His contributions to fostering strong India-US ties leave a lasting legacy —Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

≫≫More on Pages 5 & 6



Biden announces $2.5B more in aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, 30 DEC

President Joe Biden said Monday that the United States will send nearly USD 2.5 billion more in weapons to Ukraine as his administration works quickly to spend all the money it has available to help Kyiv fight off Russia before President-elect Donald Trump takes office. The package includes USD 1.25 billion in presidential drawdown authority, which allows the military to pull existing stock from its shelves and gets weapons to the battlefield faster. It also has USD 1.22 billion in longer-term weapons packages to be put on contract through the separate Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, or USAI. The new aid comes as Russia has launched a barrage of attacks against Ukraine's power facilities. —*PTI*

Don't pay for govt schemes: Didi in Sandeshkhali

SANDESHKHALI, 30 DEC

In her first visit to Sandeshkhali since protests erupted over alleged land grabbing and sexual harassment of women by local TMC leaders earlier this year, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday asked locals not to pay anyone to avail of benefits of any state-run scheme. Banerjee visited the island, situated on the borders of the Sundarbans, in North 24 Parganas district to chair a public distribution programme. She also urged local women not to pay attention if anyone calls them for any reason. Banerjee alleged that a huge amount of money was used to flare up the protest in Sandeshkhali. —*PTI*

Sisodia seeks crowd funding for polls

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Monday launched an online crowd funding platform and appealed for financial support from the public to contest the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls.

Sisodia, a key figure in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), has been fielded from the Jangpura constituency this time.

He has represented the Patparganj constituency in the Delhi Assembly since 2015.

"Every time I contested elections and achieved success because of your financial support. This time too I want your financial support for my election," he wrote on X. The former deputy chief minister also posted a video featuring his journey from a journalist to politician. "Every rupee you donate will help advance the politics of work and education in Delhi," he said in a press conference. The AAP has start a hashtag on X, "MS4Jangpura" seeking public support.

A blue and yellow coloured poster with the message "support and fund Manish Sisodia" was also released during the presser.

Delhi LG flays Kejri for Atishi temporary CM remark

Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena expressed concern over AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal labelling Atishi a "temporary chief minister" and called it a "flagrant disregard for the democratic spirit and values enshrined in the Constitution". n a letter to the chief minister, Saxena said Kejriwal's remark was an insult to President Droupadi Murmu, who appointed her, as well as himself as her representative. —*PTI*

PSLV-C60 LIFTS OFF WITH SPADEX FROM SRIHARIKOTA

SRIHARIKOTA, 30 DEC

ISRO's PSLV-C60 rocket carrying two spacecraft that would aid in demonstration of space docking, a critical technology for future space missions, lifted off from the spaceport here late on Monday.

Billed as a prelude to ISRO's setting up its own Space Station by 2035, the 44.5 metre tall Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) carried Spacecraft A and B, each weighing 220kg that would help in space docking, satellite servicing and interplanetary missions.

Upon the conclusion of the 25-hour countdown, PSLV-C60 in its 62nd flight lifted-off majestically, emanating thick orange colour fumes, from the first launch pad at this spaceport.

The lift-off was originally planned at 9.58 pm on Monday but ISRO authorities later rescheduled to 10 pm. However, there was no official information behind the reason for the rescheduling.

By mastering the space docking technologies, ISRO is set to enhance its operational flexibility besides expanding its mission horizons.

Apart from the SpaDeX mission, ISRO scientists have configured the fourth stage of the rocket (PS-4) as the PSLV Orbital Experimental Module-4 (POEM-4) in which 24 small payloads which comprise of 14 from ISRO and 10 from academia, would be placed in over 90 minutes after the lift-off in different orbits. —*PTI*

A NEW LOW

Mentally disturbing: Rohit may call it quits after Sydney Test

MELBOURNE, 30 DEC

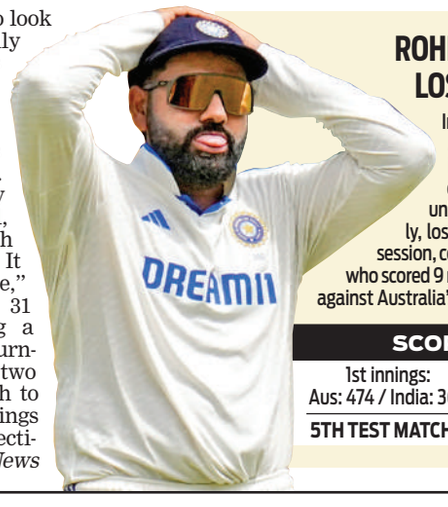
Rohit Sharma has reportedly 'made up his mind' about Test retirement and is likely to hang his boots after the last Test of the 2024-25 Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Sydney if India fail to make it to the 2025 World Test Championship (WTC) Final.

The report said the skipper will try to convince the selectors to let him play in the WTC Final if India reach there.

He looked shattered as he confessed to being "disturbed" after the heavy loss to Australia in the fourth Test here, saying there are "things" that he needs to address at a personal level apart from the team's collective problems amid intense focus on his form.

"But mentally, look, you know, it is disturbing without a doubt. If you have come here and try and do successfully what you're supposed to and if those things don't fall in place, that is a big disappointment," he said. With 31 runs in six innings across three Tests, the Indian skipper's tally is just one more than Jasprit Bumrah's series wicket-haul of 30. The clamour for Test retirement have reached a crescendo and Sydney could be his final port of call in whites but he doesn't want to go out without a fight.

"And there are things that we as a team need to look at. I personally need to look at as well. So, we will try and see what happens. You know, there is still a game to go. If we can play that game well, you know, with 2-2, it is a draw. It will be really nice," he said. With 31 December being a travel day, the turnaround time of two days isn't enough to ensure that all things wrong can be rectified.. —*Salar News*



ROHIT, VIRAT FAIL AGAIN AS INDIA LOSE FOURTH TEST BY 184 RUNS

India faced a crushing 184-run defeat against Australia in the fourth Test in Melbourne, raising concerns about the future of pivotal players Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. Chasing an unlikely target of 340, India faltered dramatically, losing seven wickets for just 34 runs in the final session, collapsing to 155 all out in 79.1 overs. Both Rohit, who scored 9 runs, and Kohli, who managed only 5, struggled against Australia's bowling attack. ≫≫More on Page 8

SCOREBOARD

1st innings:	2nd innings:	
Aus: 474 / India: 369	Aus: 369 / India: 155	Aus wins by 184 to take 2-1 lead

5TH TEST MATCH AT SYDNEY (3 TO 7 JAN)

PHOTO: X

1 killed, 3 injured in a multi-vehicle collision in City

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

A 50-year-old man lost his life, and three others sustained injuries in a serial collision involving an autorickshaw, a car, and a lorry in the Dabaspet Industrial Area on Monday morning. The accident occurred around 8am on the National Highway (NH-48). According to the traffic police, the autorickshaw passengers—Venkatamma, 60, and Nutan, 20,— along with the driver, Kemparaju, 30, were injured. Eeranna later succumbed to his injuries. Traffic police were deployed to manage the situation, while the three damaged vehicles were removed from the road. *—Salar News*

Railway ticket inspector arrested in KAS exam fraud

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

The City police arrested a Chief Railway Ticket Inspector for allegedly extorting Rs 50 lakh from candidates by promising to help them clear the Karnataka Administrative Service exam. The accused, 49-year-old Govindaraju, attached to South Western Railways, was detained by the Vijayanagar police based on a suo motu case. Speaking to **Salar News**, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru West, S Girish, said that Govindaraju contacted candidates appearing for competitive exams, including KAS, PDO, and Village Accountant, through intermediaries. He assured them success in exchange for hefty sums, charging Rs 25 lakh for PDO posts and Rs 50 lakh for KAS prelims. *—Salar News*

CT Ravi urges action against cops for ill-treating him

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

BJP MLC CT Ravi on Monday urged Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot to take necessary legal action against the police personnel involved in his alleged 'illegal arrest' and for ill-treating him while he was in police custody in connection with a sexual harassment case registered against him for using a derogatory word against Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar. He also requested the Governor to arrange for immediate additional security. Speaking to reporters here, Ravi said the incident happened inside the council and the consent of the Council Chairperson, Basavaraj Horatti, should have been sought since all the powers inside the Council vests with him. The mistake committed by the police was that the case was registered without seeking the Chairperson's consent.—*PTI*

CID to probe contractor's death, BJP wants CBI probe

BJP to lay seige to Kharge's residence if demands are not met

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

State government has handed over the contractor suicide case to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), state Home Minister G Parameshwara said on Monday.

"BJP has made allegations against Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge in this case. We have handed over the matter to the CID," Parameshwara told reporters here.

Civil contractor Sachin Panchal allegedly died by suicide by lying before a moving train in Bidar district on 26 December.

In his suicide note, he accused Priyank's close aide Raju Kapanur of compelling him to take the drastic step.

He alleged that he was receiving death threats to pay rupees one crore to Kapanur, who rejected the charges.

Priyank too said he had no role in the case as the suicide note did not name him. He had also demanded an inquiry into the case to bring out the truth.

Home Minister Parameshwara said that BJP has made allegations against Minister Priyank Kharge after which the case was transferred PHOTO: X

Meanwhile, BJP reiterated its demand for a CBI inquiry and warned that if its demands are not met, they would lay siege to Congress party President Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in Kalaburagi in January. "Kharge family is very powerful and the State police cannot probe them and there is no possibility of impartial investigation. Hence, the matter should be handed over to the CBI," BJP state president BY Vijayendra said. Vijayendra said the entire police department in and around Kalaburgi district is under the clutches of the Kharge family.

Vijayendra also demanded that the Panchal family should be given protection and a compensation of rupees one crore.

One of the family members should be given a government job, he added. He said BJP will wait till 3 January to see if the Chief Minister orders CBI inquiry.

"Or else BJP will stage a massive protest in Kalaburgi on 4 January and we will also lay siege to Kharge's house," he added. Vijayendra said there was another important aspect mentioned in Sachin Panchal's suicide note that there was a conspiracy to eliminate MLA Basavaraj Mattimud, BJP leaders Chandru Patil, Manikanth Rathod and a pontiff Siddalinga Swami. "Contract killers were from Maharashtra, which is a very serious matter," he added. *—PTI*

RENUKASWAMY MURDER CASE

State to challenge Darshan's bail in SC

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

State government has decided to challenge the High Court's decision on granting bail to Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa and others accused in the Renukaswamy murder case.

Senior Supreme Court advocate Anil C Nishani has been appointed to represent the state in the matter.

The decision to file a special leave petition (SLP) against the High Court's order was confirmed in an official communication issued by Somanatha, First Additional Solicitor and Ex-Officio Deputy Secretary to the Government (Home Department). The government has sanctioned the preparation and filing of the SLP before the Supreme Court.

The state has also engaged senior advocate Siddarth Luthra as special counsel to argue the case. The public prosecutor has been directed to coordinate the preparation of the SLP.

Darshan, along with co-accused Pavithra Gowda and others, was arrested in connection with the kidnapping and murder of Renukaswamy, a resident of Chitradurga. Renukaswamy was allegedly killed in Bengaluru in June, purportedly at Thoogudeepa's behest, following allegations that he had sent lewd messages to Gowda.

Darshan PHOTO: PTI

Darshan got interim bail on medical grounds on 30 October. However, on 13 December, the High Court granted regular bail to both Darshan and Gowda. This development came despite Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda's recommendation to the State government to appeal against the actor's bail. *—Salar News*

Judges must accept evidence given by probe officer: HC

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Judges must only evaluate the evidence collected by the investigating officer (IO) to assess its sufficiency, the Karnataka High Court has said.

In a judgment delivered by Justice HP Sandesh recently, the court emphasised the limited scope for revising discharge applications. It noted that conducting a "mini-trial" during such proceedings is not permissible, and arguments from the defense cannot be taken into account.

This ruling came while dismissing a revision petition filed by Dr Mohankumar M, who faced allegations of abetting an offense under Section 109 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Dr Mohankumar was accused of facilitating a payment of Rs 25 lakh to secure an MD (Pediatrics) admission at MS Ramaiah Medical College for the daughter of Accused No. 1 Dr C Anisha Roy.

PHOTO: PTI

The petitioner contended that the payment was a financial favour to Accused No. 1, who had sought assistance for his daughter's education. The payment was made directly to the institution via RTGS, and he denied receiving any money back from Accused No. 1, he argued.

The petitioner argued that providing financial help should not be interpreted as abetment. He also noted that Accused Nos. 3 and 5 had been discharged by the trial court on similar grounds and sought discharge for himself.

The prosecution pointed out that Rs 17.5 lakh in cash had been deposited into Dr Mohankumar's account prior to the Rs 25 lakh payment, which was not reflected in his tax filings.

Justice Sandesh remarked, "The criteria applied to others do not benefit the petitioner, as no explanation has been provided for the deposited cash." *—PTI*

Rlys revise timings for Mysuru division

MYSURU, 30 DEC

Southwestern Railways Mysuru Division has announced revised train timings effective from 1 January for departures and arrivals at Mysuru and other stations en route. According to the new schedule, Train No. 16217, operating between Mysuru and Sainagar Shirdi, will depart Mysuru at 5.00am starting 6 January. Train No. 06299, from Nanjangud to Mysuru, will leave Nanjangud at 10.25am and arrive in Mysuru at 11.15am. Train No. 06300, Mysuru to Nanjangud Passenger, is scheduled to arrive in Nanjangud at 10.00am

Train No. 60276, from Mysuru to Chamarajanagar, will depart Mysuru at 11:45am and reach Chamarajanagar at 1:30pm. Revised schedule aims to enhance travel convenience for passengers, stated Girish Kalagonda, Divisional Commercial Manager of Mysuru Division. *—Salar News*

'BEING OVERWHELMED'

KSDL official dies by suicide, cites stress

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

An official of the Karnataka Soap and Detergent Limited (KSDL) was found hanging at his residence in Mahalakshmi Layout on Monday morning.

The deceased has been identified as Amrit Siriyur, 40, a resident of Muneshwara Block in the City. According to preliminary investigations, Siriyur had been battling depression for several weeks. He had remarried after the death of his first wife. But later got divorced due to family issues.

Police believe the incident occurred late on Sunday night. The investigation team found a single-page suicide note from Siriyur's body. In the note, he expressed feeling overwhelmed by family problems and work-related stress. Sources indicate that he named several senior officials and colleagues, accusing them of exerting pressure on him.

PHOTO: PTI

- Sources indicate that he named several senior officials and colleagues, accusing them of exerting pressure on him in his death note

The Mahalakshmi Layout police said they are still investigating the circumstances surrounding the death. "We cannot issue any statement until probe is complete," a police official said.(Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.) *—Salar News*

FIR against PSI for forging birth certificate

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

An FIR has been filed against a police Sub-Inspector (PSI) for allegedly forging his birth certificate to secure his position in the police department. The accused, Kashilingegowda SB, currently serving at the Byadarahalli police station, is under investigation for forging fraudulent document during the 2017-18 PSI recruitment process. Kashilingegowda claimed his date of birth as 15 April 1988 on the documents, while his official records say that he was born in 1987. This discrepancy in the documents allowed him to bypass the maximum age limit of 30 years mandated for PSI applicants.

The matter came to light after an advocate raised concerns with the Bengaluru Police Commissioner, questioning Kashilingegowda's eligibility for recruitment. Following the complaint, a departmental inquiry was launched. Investigators discovered that Kashilingegowda had allegedly altered his birth year with the assistance of a friend employed as an assistant at an Anganwadi centre in Kunigal. The forged document were then used to apply for the PSI post. *—Salar News*

Forest officials trap tigress in Mysuru

MYSURU, 30 DEC

A four-year-old female tiger, which had caused panic among residents of HD Kote, Chakahalli, Shanthipura, Tiger Block, and surrounding villages for nearly two weeks, was captured by the Forest Department in an operation at KG Hundi village in HD Kote Taluk.

According to the Forest officials, the tigress walked into a walk-in cage set up by the department at an agricultural field on Sunday night.

Over the past two weeks, the tigress had been terrorising the area, killing cattle, goats, and sheep. In response, the Forest Department had set up the cage on 17 December.The department even conducted a thermal drone, used kumki tamed elephants like operations, leopard task force, other department personnel were also involved in operation to nab the elusive tigress.

Deputy Conservator of Forests, Mysuru Circle, B Basavaraju, confirmed that the tigress would be released into a suitable wildlife sanctuary after undergoing a health check-up and following the necessary procedures, in accordance with the guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority *—Salar News*

The department even conducted a thermal drone, used kumki tamed elephants like operations to nab the tigress PHOTO: SALAR

WELCOMING 2025

11,000 police officers to monitor New Year revellers

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Monday said more than 11,000 police personnel have been deployed, and all necessary preparations have been made, to ensure peace and safety during New Year celebrations in Bengaluru city and the entire state.

Police officials said the government has permitted New Year celebrations only until 1 am, and the public is allowed to hold celebrations only within the prescribed time limit.

"All necessary preparations have been made to ensure that no untoward incidents happen in Bengaluru City and the entire state. We have also warned people to not cause disturbances. Thousands of cops have been deployed. I appeal to the public not to get involved in any untoward incidents. Celebrate the New Year happily. Let your New Year be very joyful," Parameshwara said.

The government has permitted New Year celebrations only until 1 am PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, Bengaluru district administration restricted entry to Nandi Hills from 6pm on Tuesday to 7am on Wednesday.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said more than 1000 cameras have been installed across the city. He said all departments concerned have been alerted to not tolerate any breach of law. "Law and order will be maintained. Troublemakers will be arrested," he said. A total of 11,830 police personnel, including senior officers and civil defence staff will be maintaining vigilance to thwart rave parties and drug-related activities. *—PTI*

MYSURU GEARS UP FOR NY

MYSURU, 30 DEC

Mysuru City Police Commissioner Seema Latkar issued guidelines on Monday for safe New Year celebrations, emphasising heightened security measures and the necessity of obtaining mandatory permissions for hosting events. According to the release, all hotels, restaurants, clubs, homestays, service apartments, apartment residents' associations, shopping malls, resorts, and other organizations must secure prior approval from the police to hold New Year parties. These celebrations must conclude by 1am on the night of 31 December. In a related development, Deputy Commissioner (DC) G Lakshmikanth Reddy directed the Mysuru district administration to ensure basic facilities for devotees visiting the Chamundeshwari Temple on New Year's Day. Reddy instructed to deploy adequate personnel at entry and exit points. He also directed KSRTC officials to operate additional buses to Chamundi Hills from City Railway Station and the Suburban Bus Stand. *—Salar News*

DK Suresh sues woman & hubby for misusing his name

BENGALURU, 30 DEC

Congress leader DK Suresh on Monday lodged a complaint with the police here seeking action against a woman who allegedly cheated some people by misusing his name.

The woman identified as Aishwarya Gowda and her husband Harish KN were arrested on a complaint by Vanitha Aithal, owner of Vaarahi World of Gold in Chandra Layout in the city.

Aishwarya Gowda borrowed 14.660 kg of gold from Aithal but failed to return it. She had gained Aithal's trust by claiming to be the sister of former MP DK Suresh. Suresh said, "It has been reported in the media that Mrs. Aishwarya Gowda alias Navyasri has cheated many people of gold and cash by misusing my name." He urged the authorities to take action against her and prevent future misuse and cheating. Gowda and her husband have been remanded in police custody until 6 January. *—PTI*

Pune pub sends condoms with NY invite, Cong fumes

PUNE, 30 DEC

A row has erupted over a pub in Pune allegedly sending condoms and ORS to invitees of the New Year's eve bash, prompting police to record statements of invitees. Maharashtra Pradesh Youth Congress lodged a complaint with Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar demanding strict action against the pub's management after the invite went viral with visuals of condoms and ORS (Oral Rehydration Solution). "We are not against pubs and nightlife. However, the marketing strategy to attract youngsters is against the traditions of Pune city. We demand strict action by police against the pub management," Maharashtra Pradesh Youth Congress member Akshay Jain stated on Monday. A senior police officer confirmed receiving the complaint on Sunday. *—PTI*

NC founder's day excluded from J&K holiday list

SRINAGAR, 30 DEC

The ruling National Conference in Jammu and Kashmir has expressed disappointment over the lieutenant governor's decision to not include days commemorating 1931 martyrs and party founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in the list of holidays for 2025. "Today's list of holidays and the decision reflects the BJP's disregard for Kashmir's history and democratic struggle," National Conference (NC) chief spokesman Tanvir Sadiq said in a post on X on Sunday night. Notably, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had earlier this month hinted that holidays removed after abrogation of Article 370 will be restored. 13 July was observed as a public holiday in Jammu and Kashmir to commemorate the 23 men who fell to the bullets of Dogra Maharaja's soldiers in 1931. *—PTI*

M'rashtra BJP suspends 11 for anti-party activities

AKOLA, 30 DEC

BJP has suspended 11 functionaries, including a Zilla Parishad member, for six years in Maharashtra's Akola district for anti-party activities. Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP, had seen rebellion in the district in the run-up to the November assembly polls, which triggered the action, a local leader said. State unit chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule has been informed of the action, BJP district president Kishor Mangte Patil told PTI on Monday. In the 20 November assembly polls, results of which were declared on 23 November, BJP won Akola East but lost to the Congress in Akola West constituency. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Defence exports hit Rs 21K crore in a decade: Rajnath

MHOW, 30 DEC

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday that India's defence exports have crossed a record Rs 21,000 crore from Rs 2,000 crore a decade ago. Addressing officers at the Army War College (AWC) in more than two-centuries-old Mhow Cantonment, Singh said a target has been set to achieve defence exports of Rs 50,000 crore by 2029. He said mastering frontier technologies is the need of the hour in the constantly evolving times, noting that military training centres are playing a crucial role in equipping and readying soldiers to deal with future challenges. He stressed the need for the military to be well-trained and equipped to fight off such attacks and lauded training centres in Mhow for their valuable contributions. The defence minister is on a two-day visit to MP since Sunday. *—PTI*

BJP: Rahul flew to Vietnam for NY party amid mourning

When will Sanghis stop this 'take diversion politics', asks Cong

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla *PHOTO: ANI*

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla on Monday launched a scathing attack against Congress leader and Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi saying that he has flown abroad to celebrate when the entire nation is mourning the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

He alleged that Congress has "abused and insulted" Dr Singh.

He said Rahul Gandhi has flown abroad to ring in "the New Year even as the nation observes seven days of mourning".

"Congress doesn't care for Dr Manmohan Singh. They abused and insulted him during his lifetime They continue to do so now. Yesterday nobody went to collect his ashes. Congress even denied Bharat Ratna to Dr Manmohan Singh as per the latest disclosures. This is their true face," Poonawalla said on X.

"Rahul Gandhi has changed the meaning of LoP from Leader of Opposition to Leader of 'paryatan' and Leader of the party. At a time when the country is in grief over the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Rahul Gandhi has left for 'paryatan' and party, as per media reports...Rahul Gandhi and 'paryatan' is nothing new. At a time when the 26/11 attack happened in Mumbai, he was partying all night. He is not concerned about the demise of Dr Manmohan Singh..." he alleged while talking to the media.

- Rahul Gandhi and 'paryatan' is nothing new. At a time when the 26/11 attack happened in Mumbai, he was partying all night. He is not concerned about the demise of Dr Manmohan Singh, alleged Poonawalla

Congress MP Manickam Tagore hit back at the BJP over its allegations.

"When will the Sanghis stop this 'Take Diversion' politics? The way Modi denied Dr. Saheb a place for cremation on the Yamuna banks and how his ministers cornered Dr. Saheb's family is shameful. If Mr Gandhi travels privately, why does it bother you? Get well in New Year," Tagore posted on X. *—ANI*

ANNA UNIV RAPE CASE

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) President Vijay and Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi during a meeting, in Chennai, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Vijay urges TN Guv to ensure protection for women

CHENNAI, 30 DEC

Amid the outrage in Tamil Nadu over the sexual assault of a woman student inside a technical varsity recently, actor-politician Vijay on Monday urged Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi for steps to ensure safety of women in the state.

Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK) founder called on Governor Ravi at the Raj Bhavan here and submitted a memorandum. BJP state chief K Annamalai lauded Vijay for knocking at the doors of the Raj Bhavan over the issue.

The demands from the leader of the fledgling party included 'protecting' law and order, according to a TVK release.

In a hand-written letter addressed to "dear sisters" and posted on the Instagram account of his party, he said "it is known that it is pointless in asking those who govern us, no matter how many times we ask them. That's what this letter is for."

Meanwhile, TN BJP leader Annamalai welcomed Vijay's meeting with the Governor.

A fact-finding team from the National Commission for Women commenced its enquiry into the sexual assault.

Amidst an allegation of denial of police permission for their agitation on Monday, scores of opposition AIADMK members attempted to stage protests throughout Tamil Nadu claiming the involvement of another person in the sexual assault case in which the police had already arrested a man. *—PTI*

AAP promises temple priests ₹18K a month, BJP calls it 'stunt'

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with Delhi CM Atishi addresses a press conference, in New Delhi, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said that if re-elected, his party would launch Pujari Granthi Samman Yojana to give a monthly allowance of Rs 18,000 to temple priests and granthis of gurdwaras.

The announcement comes ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections, with AAP seeking to retain power for a fourth consecutive term.

"Pujaris and granthis are an important part of our society, but they are often a neglected section. For the first time in the country, we are introducing a scheme to support them, under which they will receive a monthly allowance of Rs 18,000," Kejriwal said, adding that registration for the scheme will start from Tuesday.

The AAP chief also said he would visit the Hanuman Mandir in Connaught Place on Tuesday to oversee the registration process for the priests there.

The BJP the AAP move a "political stunt" and claimed that no one would get even a single rupee since the latter does not have any data with him.

Delhi BJP chief Veerendra Sachdeva said that Kejriwal is now a "defeated and desperate" leader who is making populist announcements daily to stay in power.

Former Delhi MP Parvesh Verma said Kejriwal is remembering ishwar and waheguru because of his the fear of loss. He did not think of them for the past 10 years, Verma alleged, adding that Kejriwal only thought of maulvis of the mosque and used to see only one religion and one vote bank. *—PTI*

'FALSE' CLAIMS ON WIFE: AAP'S SANJAY TO SUE BJP

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Monday said he will file a defamation case against BJP MP Manoj Tiwari and its IT cell in-charge Amit Malviya for their claims that his wife Anita Singh is not a registered voter in Delhi.

Responding to Singh's allegation, Tiwari and Malviya claimed that though AAP leader and his wife cast their votes in Delhi for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, as per an affidavit filed by Anita Singh, she is a registered voter in Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh, which makes her vote in Delhi both "invalid" and "illegal". *—PTI*

Sanjay Singh *PHOTO: ANI*

Kerala Cong MLA Uma stable after 15ft fall

KOCHI, 30 DEC

Condition of Thrikkakara Congress MLA Uma Thomas, who suffered severe head and spinal injuries from a fall off a gallery at Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium here on Sunday evening, shows signs of improvement Minister Rajeeve said. The MLA, who sustained head and lung injuries as she fell from a height of around 15ft, is under treatment at a private hospital in the city

Whereas, the private hospital treating Uma Thomas, in its latest medical bulletin issued on Monday, stated that her vital signs are stable while her lung injury has worsened.

The manager of an event management company was arrested on Monday over security lapses.

Krishnakumar, the manager of the Kochi-based Oscar Event Management Company, which organised the event at the stadium, was arrested and later released on bail, according to police.

The accident happened when the dancers were set for the performance, the minister said, adding that he and Congress MP Hibi Eden left for the hospital after the eight-minute-long performance required for Guinness records was completed. *—PTI*

GLOBAL TECH DOMINANCE ?

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Monday called on Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella at his residence here and sought the IT major's support to develop a strong ecosystem. CM was accompanied by Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy, Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari and others *PHOTO: PTI*

T'gana Assembly passes resolution to confer Bharat Ratna for Singh

HYDERABAD, 30 DEC

Telangana Legislative Assembly on Monday passed a unanimous resolution calling on Centre to confer the Bharat Ratna on former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away on 26 December at the age of 92.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy moved the motion to condole Singh's death and express gratitude for his role in the formation of Telangana state in 2014.

In the session, Reddy highlighted Singh's contributions, including landmark legislations such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), the Right to Information Act, and the Land Acquisition Act, which were introduced under his leadership.

Expressing grief over his death, Reddy said, "Singh's death is an irreparable loss for the country".

Reddy praised Singh's leadership in fulfilling the aspirations of Telangana. He announced that the state government would install a statue of Singh in the financial district of Hyderabad in recognition of his contributions.

However, Leader of Opposition K Chandrashekar Rao did not attend the session.

In support of the motion, BRS Working President KT Rama Rao called Singh "the silent architect of modern India." He also suggested that the Assembly pass a separate resolution urging the Centre to set up a memorial for former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in the national capital.

Meanwhile, BJP floor leader Maheshwar Reddy also expressed his party's support for the condolence motion. However he made comments regarding Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, which led to objections from Legislative Minister Sridhar Babu. The minister requested the Speaker to expunge Reddy's remarks. *—Agencies*

1ST VISIT TO SANDESHKHALI

Don't pay anyone for govt benefits: Didi

SANDESHKHALI, 30 DEC

In her first visit to Sandeshkhali since protests erupted over alleged land grabbing and sexual harassment of women by local TMC leaders earlier this year, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday asked locals not to pay anyone to avail of benefits of any state-run scheme.

Banerjee visited the island, situated on the borders of the Sundarbans, in North 24 Parganas district to chair a public distribution programme.

"Do not pay money to anyone for welfare schemes which we are providing. These programmes are run by the government and the money belongs to the state. You are getting benefits directly through your bank accounts. Remember this. The money is of the people. It's your right," the chief minister said.

She also urged local women not to pay attention if anyone calls them for any reason.

- She also urged local women not to pay attention if anyone calls them for any reason

Banerjee alleged that a huge amount of money was used to flare up the protest in Sandeshkhali.

"I will tell you to stay and live together. Be aware of mischievous people. And women should not go if someone calls you. If you want to enrol for a state-run scheme, then the 'Duare Sarkar' (the government at doorstep) will come to you.

"I know that a big game was behind the stir and money was in play. People later realised that the entire matter was a lie. The truth eventually comes out," she said.

Sandeshkhali witnessed large-scale protests earlier this year over alleged land-grabbing and sexual harassment of women by local TMC leaders. *—PTI*

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public distribution programme, at Sandeshkhali, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Beed's slain sarpanch's brother moves HC

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 30 DEC

Dhananjay Munde *PHOTO: PTI*

Murdered sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh's brother approached the Bombay High Court on Monday seeking its direction to the Maharashtra government to "cancel" the ministerial post of NCP leader Dhananjay Munde for ensuring fair probe.

The petitioner claimed Munde had been associated with the head of a criminal syndicate in Beed who has allegedly played a prominent role in the murder of the Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh.

The petitioner requested that the Aurangabad bench of the high court allow his petition.

According to police, Santosh Deshmukh was abducted and killed on December 9 allegedly for opposing an extortion bid by some individuals who had demanded money from a windmill company in Beed district.

Opposition parties and an MLA of BJP accused Dhananjay Munde of having close links with his "aide" Walmik Karad, absconding after he was named in the FIR in the extortion case.

Four people have been arrested so far in connection with the murder.

The petitioner also requested the court that directions be issued to the government to book Walmik Karad under sections 103 and 137 of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita for murder and criminal conspiracy, and under the provisions of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) 1999.

Salunke told PTI that they would seek an urgent hearing on Tuesday. *—PTI*

₹21 cr embezzled from Maharashtra sports complex

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 30 DEC

A computer operator has allegedly embezzled Rs 21.59 crore from a government-run sports complex in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Maharashtra. The primary suspect, Harshkumar Kshirsagar, a contractual computer operator, is currently at large after carrying out the fraud over 11 months, according to police reports. Authorities have arrested a woman associated with Kshirsagar and are interrogating her regarding the case. As investigations unfolded, Kshirsagar sent a letter to the Jawaharnagar police on 26 December, alleging that he was coerced into misappropriating the funds by senior officials at the sports facility. Officials suggest Kshirsagar manipulated the complex's email address registered with the bank. —*PTI*

Katra shutdown against ropeway enters 6th day

REASI/JAMMU, 30 DEC

The shutdown in Katra against the proposed Vaishno Devi ropeway project entered its sixth day on Monday, as youth continued a hunger strike demanding the release of several individuals detained by police during the protests. The Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti called for the shutdown on Wednesday, announcing that all activities would remain suspended during the bandh in Katra, the base camp for Mata Vaishno Devi. Shivani Jamwal, wife of detained Samiti leader Bhupinder Singh, joined the protesters and threatened to commit self-immolation if her husband and others were not released immediately, citing their deteriorating condition in police detention. All shops, restaurants and establishments remained closed. —*PTI*

Gulmarg, Pahalgam shiver as cold wave intensifies

SRINAGAR, 30 DEC

Cold wave conditions intensified in Gulmarg and Pahalgam in Kashmir where mercury plunged several degrees below the freezing point, even as the rest of the Valley experienced extended relief from the harsh winter, officials said on Monday. Gulmarg, a tourist resort town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a night temperature of minus 10 degree Celsius, down 2 degrees compared to the previous night, the meteorological department said. Pahalgam in south Kashmir, which serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a low of minus 9.2 degree Celsius, down from minus 8.5 degrees Celsius the previous night, the weather office said.—*PTI*

Elderly couple, neighbour found dead in MP

SHIVPURI, 30 DEC

A 75-year-old man, his wife and another woman residing in their neighbourhood were found dead under mysterious circumstances in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district on Monday morning, police said. The police suspect it to be a case of murder. Sitaram Lodhi, his wife Munni Bai, 70, and their neighbour Suraj Bai, 65 were found dead in a hut near a field, close to Lodhi's house in Rautora village of Pichor assembly, sub-divisional officer of police Prashant Sharma told reporters. While Lodhi was found with a noose tightened around his neck, his wife had head injuries. Suraj Bai appeared to have been strangled to death, the official said. Lodhi's grandson, who lived with them, went to the hut after waking up in the morning and found the bodies. He then immediately alerted the police.—*PTI*

200 trains hit as farmers squat on tracks

Farmers are protesting against the Centre for not acting on their demand for MSP

CHANDIGARH, 30 DEC

More than 200 trains were reportedly cancelled as farmers' organisations called for a statewide bandh to press the Centre for a legal guarantee for minimum support prices in Punjab on Monday.

Farmers squatted on tracks at many places, forcing the railways to cancel several trains passing through the state and short-terminated or short-originated some trains.

In Ferozepur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Bathinda, passengers were seen stranded at stations.

Commuters were seen arguing with the protesting farmers blocking the roads.

"We are seeing a successful bandh. Train services are also completely suspended and no train is entering Punjab," Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said.

Pandher also claimed their strike received strong support from transporters, employee unions, traders and religious bodies.

A cancer patient from Gujarat was stranded at a train station in Ferozepur. His wife said they had to go to Himachal Pradesh to get some medicines for him, but with train services hit, they were left in a lurch.

Farmers block a road during the statewide 'bandh' called as part their ongoing protest, near Golden Gate in Amritsar on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Roads from the district leading to Amritsar, Sri Ganganagar, and Muktsar were blocked by BKU Sidhupur activists, whose leader Ram Singh Deon, addressing the farmers, said, "This is a fight for our crops and for our future generations."

Langars of tea and 'daal-parshada' were arranged for the protesters.

The bandh's impact was also seen in some neighbouring areas of the state, including Ambala.

Hundreds of daily commuters travelling from Ambala to Chandigarh, Mohali, Patiala and other nearby cities of Punjab were thrown off stride because of the shutdown.

Buses took alternate routes to go from Ambala to Chandigarh as they had to cross a stretch of the national highway that passes through Punjab.

Many outsiders studying in coaching centres in Chandigarh faced a tough time reaching their destinations.

Farmers, under the banner of SKM (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since 13 February, after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

A "jatha" (group) of 101 farmers attempted to march to Delhi on foot three times between December 6 and 14 but were stopped by security personnel from Haryana.

Besides the MSP, farmers are also demanding a debt waiver, pension, no hike in electricity tariffs, withdrawal of police cases, and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence. — *PTI*

SC TO HEAR ON FARMERS PROTEST TODAY

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

As Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike continues for the 35th day, the Supreme Court is set to assess the Punjab government's actions regarding his medical treatment on 31 December. Despite efforts by government officials on 29 December to convince the septuagenarian to accept medical aid, Dallewal refused, fearing potential forceful removal from the protest site.

Farmers are protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border in Khanauri, demanding a legal guarantee for minimum support prices for crops. A high-level team from the Punjab government had previously urged Dallewal to seek medical assistance while continuing his fast.

The Supreme Court, which resumed hearings on 2 January 2025, had previously voiced dissatisfaction with the Punjab government's handling of the situation, granting them until 31 December to facilitate Dallewal's hospitalisation. The court directed the Union Government to provide logistical support if necessary.

Dallewal has been on hunger strike since 26 November, and farmers, under the banners of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been protesting at border points since 13 February after being halted from marching to Delhi. —*PTI*

16,000 Indians replace Palestinian workers in Israel

India's large labour pool and strong ties with Israel have positioned it as a key supplier of workers *PHOTO: X*

JERUSALEM, 30 DEC

Around 16,000 Indian workers have replaced Palestinian labourers, who were barred from entering the country since the war began last year. These workers are helping to address a severe labour shortage in Israel's construction industry, with plans underway to bring in thousands more.

Despite air raid warnings at work sites, Indian workers remain unfazed. "There's nothing to be afraid of here. Once the siren stops, we just resume our work," one worker told AFP.

High earnings in Israel have been a significant draw, with some workers making three times their usual income. This financial opportunity motivated many to travel thousands of kilometres to work in Israel, despite the ongoing conflict.

Before the conflict, construction sites were full with Arabic-speaking Palestinian labourers. Now, languages like Hindi, Hebrew, and even Mandarin dominate as Indian workers adapt to their new roles. Many of these workers are skilled and have quickly adjusted to the demands of the industry, contributing to the progress of delayed housing projects in Israel.

> High earnings in Israel have been a significant draw, with some workers making three times their usual income. This financial opportunity motivated many to travel thousands of kilometres to work in Israel, despite the ongoing conflict.

India's large labour pool and strong ties with Israel have positioned it as a key supplier of workers. Recruiter Samir Khosla, from Delhi, has facilitated the arrival of over 3,500 Indian labourers since the war began. "India was a natural choice for Israel," Khosla said, emphasising their "excellent relations."

Before the conflict, 80,000 Palestinians worked in construction, alongside 26,000 foreign labourers. The current workforce of 30,000 foreigners, including Indians, remains insufficient, leading to a 25 per cent decline in construction activity compared to pre-war levels. —*Agencies*

Law equal for all: Kalyan shades Arjun

AMARAVATI, 30 DEC

Refusing to blame Telangana Police for the action against actor Allu Arjun in the theatre stampede case, Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said the law is equal for all and police must act with public safety in mind.

Kalyan on Monday said the makers of Allu Arjun starrer 'Pushpa 2' should have reached out to the family of the woman, who died in a recent stampede at a theatre in Hyderabad, sooner. A 35-year-old woman was killed in the stampede, and her eight-year-old son was seriously injured on December 4 at RTC Crossroads when they went to watch the movie.

Addressing reporters, the Deputy Chief Minister said a gesture like this could have averted the situation from spiralling out of control and the "mountain being made out of a molehill." Following the incident, Arjun was briefly arrested by Hyderabad police, and a major controversy ensued.

Kalyan on Monday said the makers of Allu Arjun starrer 'Pushpa 2' should have reached out to the family of the woman sooner *PHOTO: X*

Terming the death of the 35-year-old woman and the hospitalisation of her son as "a very painful episode", the Janasena founder said the deceased woman and her family wanted to have a nice evening, return home, and share the experience, but it ended tragically. Though some opined that the Telangana government could have handled the issue more softly, Kalyan noted that the law "does not give preferential treatment to anyone, including him." —*PTI*

GIRLS STAGE THEIR KIDNAPPING TO MEET BTS

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 30 DEC

In an unusual turn of events, three minor girls from Maharashtra reportedly faked their own kidnapping in an attempt to raise money for a trip to South Korea to meet the popular K-pop group BTS, police revealed on Monday.

The trio, comprised of one 11-year-old and two aged 13, hail from the Dharashiv district. Their plan involved travelling to Pune to earn money for the journey to South Korea, where they hoped to meet their favourite band members.

On 27 December, a call was made to the Dharashiv police helpline, claiming that three girls had been forcibly abducted in a school van in Omerga taluka. Acting swiftly, police traced the call to a woman on a state transport bus headed for Pune. With assistance from local authorities, the police located the bus in the Mohol area of Solapur district. A shop owner at the Mohol bus stand helped the police retrieve the girls. They were taken to a nearby police station, where the Omerga police team, along with the girls' parents, soon arrived. —*PTI*

Can't ignore speeches to brainwash youth: HC

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Speeches to brainwash innocent youth and recruiting them for illegal acts against the country cannot be completely washed away in the absence of a specific terrorist act, the Delhi High Court has said and dismissed the plea of a terror case accused.

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma made the observation while rejecting the plea of Mohd Abdul Rehman, an alleged associate of Al-Qaida's Indian outfit, against his conviction and seven-year-five-month jail term by a trial court under the anti-terror UAPA law.

The appellant argued though he was held guilty of indulging in preparatory acts for the commission of a terrorist act and recruiting persons for terrorist act, there was no evidence to show he committed such acts.

The bench, however, said the terms terrorist act had a wide definition, enough to include "indulging in conspiracy with terrorist organisations and associated with persons who are rendering support to terrorist organisations", whereas the identification or existence of a specific act of terror was not required for punishment under the provisions.

> The bench said the terms terrorist act had a wide definition.

The court upheld the trial court conviction verdict, observing evidence to show he was in close connection with the other accused who were a part of a larger network.

The network was said to be carrying out inflammatory speeches, disseminating material, having links with Pakistan-based organisations and travelling there for secret meetings, recruiting persons for terrorist acts, collecting funds to help such travels and other activities fanning hatred against the country and its political leaders, among other things. —*PTI*

IN LONAVALA

'Carpenter' Carter helped build 100 houses

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

For 100 low-income families near Lonavala, Jimmy Carter was a godsend as he had helped build their houses in 2006.

For a week in October that year, the former US President and his wife Rosalynn worked alongside the families and about 2,000 volunteers to build homes at Patan near Lonavala.

The volunteers included Hollywood actor Brad Pitt and Bollywood actor John Abraham.

The houses were built under the aegis of NGO Habitat for Humanity. Carter volunteered his carpentry skills and raised money to boost the organisation's profile.

Since 1984, Carter donated one week of his time – and his building skills – every year to the organization.

Jimmy Carter's association with Habitat began in 1984 when he donated his carpentry labour skills for a week to renovate a building *PHOTO: PTI*

Carter, who left the White House in 1980 at the end of his first and only term as US President, had said in an interview that his mother Lillian joined the Peace Corps when she was 67 and worked in a leper colony near Mumbai.

"She was very near Bombay in a little village called Vikhroli," he had recalled.

Carter's association with Habitat began in 1984 when he donated his carpentry and manual labour skills for a week to renovate a building in New York. The NGO, which helps homeowners build homes alongside volunteers, was founded in Americus, Georgia near Carter's hometown of Plains. Habitat homes are not give-aways. It chooses beneficiaries from applicants depending on their ability to repay low-interest loans and the amount of sweat equity they can put into the projects. —*PTI*

With 1.6L tents UP readies for grand Maha Kumbh

MAHAKUMBHNAGAR, 30 DEC

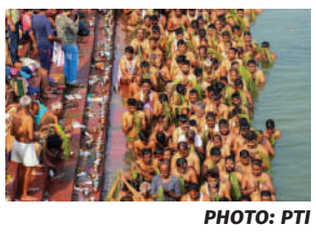


PHOTO: PTI

As the Maha Kumbh approaches, the Uttar Pradesh government is racing to finalise preparations for one of the world's largest religious gatherings, set to commence on 13 January at the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers.

For the past two months, an extensive workforce has been at work, dredging rivers, widening roads, and refurbishing ghats to accommodate an anticipated 40 crore pilgrims. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his 'Mann ki Baat' programme, referred to the event as the "Maha Kumbh of unity," encouraging attendees to foster harmony within society.

Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will span from 'Paush Poornima' on 13 January to 'Maha Shivratri' on 26 February. This year's preparations include the establishment of 160,000 tents, 150,000 toilets serviced by 15,000 sanitation workers, and an impressive array of amenities. Authorities are actively constructing nine permanent ghats, seven riverfront roads, 12 km of temporary ghats, and seven bus stands, while 4,000 hectares of land are being repurposed for the event.—*PTI*

ASHA GROOVES TO 'TAUBA TAUBA'

Legendary singer Asha Bhosle had social media abuzz with her performance on Punjabi singer Karan Aujla's superhit song 'Tauba Tauba' at her concert in Dubai over the weekend. On Monday morning, videos of Bhosle singing the track from 'Bad Newz' at her show on Sunday became viral. The veteran singer also grooved to the signature step of the viral track, made famous by Vicky Kaushal

PHOTO: SCREENGARB

After 40 yrs, toxic waste to be moved from Bhopal

The work to remove 377 metric tonnes of hazardous waste from the now-defunct Union Carbide factory in Bhopal has got underway ahead of its planned disposal near Indore.

The development comes weeks after the Madhya Pradesh High Court chided the authorities for not taking action despite repeated directions to clear the site in the Madhya Pradesh capital.

The highly toxic gas methyl isocyanate leaked from the Union Carbide pesticides factory on the intervening night of 2-3 December, 1984, killing 5,479 people and leaving more than five lakh others with health problems and long-term disabilities.

On Sunday morning, half-a-dozen GPS-enabled trucks with specially reinforced containers reached the factory site as part of the waste disposal process.

Several workers wearing special PPE kits and officials of the Bhopal Municipal Corporation, environmental agencies, doctors and incineration experts were seen working at the site. Police were also deployed around the factory.

The toxic waste will be moved to an incineration site in Pithampur near Indore, around 250 km from Bhopal, sources said.

The High Court on 3 December set a four-week deadline to shift the toxic waste from the factory, observing that even 40 years after the gas disaster, the authorities were in a "state of inertia" that may cause "another tragedy".

Describing it as a "sorry state of affairs", the HC warned the government of contempt proceedings if its directive was not followed.

"The waste of Bhopal gas tragedy is a stigma which is going to disappear after 40 years. We will dispose it by sending it safely to Pithampur," Swatantra Kumar Singh, director of the state's Gas Relief and Rehabilitation Department told PTI.

On Sunday morning, half-a-dozen GPS-enabled trucks with specially reinforced containers reached the factory site as part of the waste disposal process ***PHOTO: PTI***

He said a "green corridor" of about 250 km will be created by managing traffic to transport the waste from Bhopal to Pithampur in the shortest possible time.

Singh refused to give a specific date for the transportation of the waste and its subsequent disposal at Pithampur, but sources said in view of the HC direction, the process can start soon and the waste might reach its destination by January 3.

The official said initially some part of the waste will be burnt at the disposal unit of Pithampur and the residue (ash) will be scientifically examined to find out whether any harmful element is left in it.

"If everything is found to be fine, then the waste will be burnt to ashes within three months. Otherwise, the speed of burning will be slowed down and it might take up to nine months," Singh said.

The smoke emitted from the incinerator will be passed through four-layer special filters so that the surrounding air is not polluted and a record of this process would be kept every moment, he said.

Once the waste is incinerated and freed from harmful elements, the ash will be covered with a two-layer strong "membrane" and buried at the "landfill" to ensure it does not come in contact with soil and water in any way, Singh said.

The waste would be destroyed by an expert team under the supervision of officials from the Central Pollution Control Board and State Pollution Control Board and a detailed report would be submitted to the HC, he added.

A group of locals and activists claim that after 10 tonnes of Union Carbide waste was destroyed on a trial basis in Pithampur in 2015, the soil, underground water and water sources of the surrounding villages have become polluted.

However, Singh rejected the claim.

"It has been decided to destroy 337 metric tonnes of Union Carbide waste in Pithampur's waste disposal unit only after examining the report of this test of 2015 and all the objections," he said.

"This unit has all the arrangements to dispose of the waste safely and there is nothing to worry about," he added. Amid reports of the waste reaching Pithampur, having a population of about 1.75 lakh, a large number of people on Sunday took out a protest rally wearing black bands on their hands.

Led by a group named 'Pithampur Kshetra Raksha Manch', they held placards with slogans like "We will not let Pithampur become Bhopal" and "Save Pithampur, remove toxic waste".

Protester Rajesh Chaudhary said, "We want the air quality of Pithampur to be re-examined by scientists before the Union Carbide factory waste is destroyed. We will also try our best to present our case in the court."

Pithampur, an industrial town about 30km from Indore and 45km from the district headquarters Dhar, has about 1,250 small and big units.

Goutam Kothari, president of Pithampur Industrial Organisation, said, "We are satisfied with the arrangements made for burning down the Union Carbide waste at the industrial waste disposal unit of Pithampur.

He said the waste disposal should not be made a bogey on the basis of baseless apprehensions and local people should not be scared.But if any accident occurs in Pithampur during the waste destruction, then his organisation will launch a protest, Kothari added. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Jimmy Carter: The US Prez who was citizen of the world

Newly married and sworn as a Naval officer, Jimmy Carter left his tiny hometown in 1946 hoping to climb the ranks and see the world.

The untimely death of his father, a farmer who went by "Mr Earl," brought the submariner and his wife, Rosalynn, back to a rural life they thought they'd escaped.

The lieutenant would never be an admiral. Instead, he became commander-in-chief. And, years after his presidency ended in humbling defeat, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

The life of James Earl Carter Jr ended Sunday at 100 where it began. Plains fuelled the rise of the 39th US president, welcomed him after his fall and sustained him during 40 years of service as a global humanitarian.

With an optimism rooted in Baptist faith and an engineer's stubborn confidence, Carter showed a missionary zeal to solve problems and improve lives.

"We shouldn't judge presidents by how popular they are in their day," Carter biographer Jonathan Alter told The Associated Press. "We should judge them by how they changed the country and the world for the better. On that score, Jimmy Carter is not in the first rank of American presidents, but he stands up quite well."

Many Americans judged his presidency ineffective for failing to end an energy crisis, turn around the economy or quickly bring American hostages home from Tehran.

He won widespread admiration instead for The Carter Centre — which has advocated for public health, human rights and democracy since 1982 — and the many years he and Rosalynn swung hammers with Habitat for Humanity.

Carter's allies relished that he and Rosalynn, who died Nov 19, 2023, lived to see historians reassess his presidency.

"He doesn't quite fit in today's terms" of a Left-Right, red-blue scoreboard, said US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, a repeat visitor during his own White House bid.

Carter labelled himself "progressive" or "conservative". Republicans cast him as a Left-wing cartoon. He could be classified a centrist, Buttigieg told the AP.

Carter's vow to restore America's virtue after the shame of Vietnam and Watergate with a transparent, good-government approach didn't suit Republicans who cast government as the problem. His efficiency mandate could put him at odds with Democrats.

Still, he scored wins on the environment, education and mental health care; expanded federally protected lands; began deregulating air travel, railroads and trucking; emphasised human rights in foreign policy; and unlike later presidents, added a relative pittance to the national debt.

US president Jimmy Carter in New Delhi on 27 Oct, 2006 ***PHOTO: PTI***

Carter had charmed voters in 1976, grinning enthusiastically and promising he would "never lie" to them. Once in Washington, he could seem like a joyless engineer, insisting that political rewards would follow facts and logic.

Such tenacity worked well at Camp David as Carter brokered peace between Israel's Menachem Begin and Egypt's Anwar Sadat, but it failed him as the nation's cheerleader, beseeching Americans to get past a "crisis of confidence".

Republican Ronald Reagan exploited Carter's lecturing tone, saying "there you go again" in response to a wonky debate answer. "The Great Communicator" won all but six states.

Carter later acknowledged an incompatibility with Washington insiders who looked down on his team as "country come to town".

His closest adviser was Rosalynn Carter, who joined his Cabinet meetings. When she urged him to postpone relinquishing the Panama Canal, Carter said he was "going to do what's right" even if meant he wouldn't get re-elected, recalled her aide, Kathy Cade.

Carter won by navigating divides on race, class and ideology. He offered himself as an outsider to Atlanta and Washington, a peanut farmer with a nickname who carried his own luggage.

Born on 1 October, 1924 in a home without running water or electricity, he was raised by a progressive mother and racist father. He and Rosalynn privately supported integration in the 1950s, but he didn't push to desegregate schools, and there's no record of him supporting the 1965 Voting Rights Act as a state senator.

Carter ran to the right of his rival to win the 1970 governor's race, then landed on the cover of Time magazine by declaring that "the time for racial discrimination is over". He didn't befriend civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr's family until he ran for president.

Carter was the last Democratic nominee to sweep the Deep South. Then, as he did in Georgia, he used his power as president to appoint more non-whites than all his predecessors had, combined.

Many years later, Carter called it "inconceivable" that he didn't consult Rosalynn before moving their family back to Plains or launching his state Senate bid. He called the mother of their four children "a full partner" in government and at The Carter Centre as well as at home.

True or not, the label of a failed presidency had leading Democrats keep their distance for many years. Carter remained relevant as a freelance diplomat, writing more than 30 books and weighing in on societal challenges.

Carter declared after Donald Trump's presidential victory that America was no longer a fully functioning democracy. But he also warned Democrats against moving too far left, lest they help re-elect him, and said many failed to understand Trump's populist appeal.

Pilgrimages to Plains became advantageous again for would-be presidents in recent years, and well into their 90s, the Carters greeted visitors at Plains' Maranatha Baptist Church, where he taught Sunday School and where his last funeral will be held. In his farewell presidential address, Carter urged citizens who had embraced or rejected him to do their part as Americans.

"The struggle for human rights overrides all differences of colour, nation or language," he declared. "Those who hunger for freedom, who thirst for human dignity and who suffer for the sake of justice — they are the patriots of this cause."

Carter pledged to remain engaged as he returned "home to the South where I was born and raised," to where he had indeed become "a fellow citizen of the world." *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

In Gaza's tent camps, women wrestle with life stripped of privacy

For Gaza's women, the hardships of life in the territory's sprawling tent camps are compounded by the daily humiliation of never having privacy.

Women struggle to dress modestly while crowded into tents with extended family members, including men, and with strangers only steps away in neighbouring tents. Access to menstrual products is limited, so they cut up sheets or old clothes to use as pads. Makeshift toilets usually consist of only a hole in the sand surrounded by sheets dangling from a line, and these must be shared with dozens of other people.

Alaa Hamami has dealt with the modesty issue by constantly wearing her prayer shawl, a black cloth that covers her head and upper body.

"Our whole lives have become prayer clothes, even to the market we wear it," said the young mother of three. "Dignity is gone."

Normally, she would wear the shawl only when performing her daily Muslim prayers. But with so many men around, she keeps it on all the time, even when sleeping — just in case an Israeli strike hits nearby in the night and she has to flee quickly, she said.

Israel's 14-month-old campaign in Gaza has driven more than 90 per cent of its 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. Hundreds of thousands of them are now living in squalid camps of tents packed close together over large areas.

Sewage runs into the streets, and food and water are hard to obtain. Winter is setting in. Families often wear the same clothes for weeks because they left clothing and many other belongings behind as they fled.

Everyone in the camps searches daily for food, clean water and firewood. Women feel constantly exposed.

Gaza has always been a conservative society. Most women wear the hijab, or head scarf, in the presence of men who are not immediate family. Matters of women's health — pregnancy, menstruation and contraception — tend not to be discussed publicly.

"Before we had a roof. Here it does not exist," said Hamami, whose prayer shawl is torn and smudged with ash from cooking fires. "Here our entire lives have become exposed to the public. There is no privacy for women."

Doaa Helli said she has torn up her old clothes to use for menstrual pads ***PHOTO: UNICEF***

Even simple needs are hard to meet

Wafaa Nasrallah, a displaced mother of two, says life in the camps makes even the simplest needs difficult, like getting period pads, which she cannot afford. She tried using pieces of cloth and even diapers, which have also increased in price.

For a bathroom, she has a hole in the ground, surrounded by blankets propped up by sticks.

The UN says more than 6,90,000 women and girls in Gaza require menstrual hygiene products, as well as clean water and toilets. Aid workers have been unable to meet demand, with supplies piling up at crossings from Israel. Stocks of hygiene kits have run out, and prices are exorbitant. Many women have to choose between buying pads and buying food and water.

Doaa Hellis, a mother of three living in a camp, said she has torn up her old clothes to use for menstrual pads. "Wherever we find fabric, we tear it up and use it."

A packet of pads costs 45 shekels (USD 12), "and there is not even five shekels in the whole tent," she said.

Anera, a rights group active in Gaza, says some women use birth control pills to halt their periods. Others have experienced disruptions in their cycles because of the stress and trauma of repeated displacement.

The terrible conditions pose real risks to women's health, said Amal Seyam, the director of the Women's Affairs Center in Gaza, which provides supplies for women and surveys them about their experiences.

She said some women have not changed clothes for 40 days. That and improvised cloth pads "will certainly create" skin diseases, diseases related to reproductive health and psychological conditions, she said.

"Imagine what a woman in Gaza feels like, if she's unable to control conditions related to hygiene and menstrual cycles," Seyam said.

Everything is destroyed

Hellis remembered a time not so long ago, when being a woman felt more like a joy and less like a burden.

"Women are now deprived of everything, no clothes, no bathroom. Their psychology is completely destroyed," she said.

Seyam said the center has tracked cases where girls have been married younger, before the age of 18, to escape the suffocating environment of their family's tents. The war will "continue to cause a humanitarian disaster in every sense of the word. And women always pay the biggest price," she said.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, over half of them women and children, according to the territory's Health Ministry. Its count does not differentiate between combatants and civilians.

Israel launched its assault in retaliation for the Oct. 7, 2023, attack by Hamas on southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted around 250 others.

With large swaths of Gaza's cities and towns levelled, women wrestle with reduced lives in their tents.

Hamami can walk the length of her small tent in a few strides. She shares it with 13 other people from her extended family. During the war, she gave birth to a son, Ahmed, who is now 8 months old. Between caring for him and her two other children, washing her family's laundry, cooking and waiting in line for water, she says there's no time to care for herself.

She has a few objects that remind her of what her life once was, including a powder compact she brought with her when she fled her home in the Shati camp of Gaza City. The makeup is now caked and crumbling. She managed to keep hold of a small mirror through four different displacements over the past year. It's broken into two shards that she holds together every so often to catch a glimpse of her reflection. "Previously, I had a wardrobe that contained everything I could wish for," she said. "We used to go out for a walk every day, go to wedding parties, go to parks, to malls, to buy everything we wanted." Women "lost their being and everything in this war," she said. "Women used to take care of themselves before the war. Now everything is destroyed." *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Landing incident: Flights suspended at Helifax airport

HALIFAX, 30 DEC

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada is investigating an incident involving a plane at the Halifax Stanfield International Airport, which one passenger described as a rough landing that sparked flames. Nikki Valentine, who was on the PAL Airlines flight, said passengers felt a "massive rumble" upon landing Saturday night. "The cabin tilted, we saw sparks and then flames and then smoke started getting sucked into the cabin," Valentine said Sunday. Airport Spokesperson Tiffany Chase said an Air Canada Express flight operated by PAL Airlines, arriving from St John's, Newfoundland, experienced an incident upon landing at approximately 9.30pm. *—PTI*

Hotel fire in Bangkok tourist destination kills 3

BANGKOK, 30 DEC

A fire broke out at a hotel near Bangkok's Khao San Road, a popular tourist destination, killing three foreigners and injuring several other people, Thai police said on Monday. The three who died in the fire on Sunday night were all foreign tourists, Police Colonel Sanong Saengmanee told The Associated Press. One was found dead at the scene and the other two died after being transported to the hospital. Police later identified the dead as a Brazilian woman, a Ukrainian man and an American man. Four people were hospitalised, of whom one was in critical condition. The fire erupted on the 5th floor of the six-story Ember Hotel, police said. Khao San Road is a popular backpacker street in the Thai capital that's also known for its lively nightlife. *—PTI*

Rape case: Pelicot won't appeal his sentence

PARIS, 30 DEC

The ex-husband of Gisèle Pelicot won't appeal his 20-year prison sentence for drugging and raping her and allowing dozens of other men to also rape her while she was unconscious, in a case that revolted France, his lawyer said Monday. Dominique Pelicot wants to spare his ex-wife the ordeal of another trial, lawyer Béatrice Zavarro said in an interview with broadcaster France Info. She said 17 of the 50 other men found guilty this month after a trial that lasted more than three months have decided to appeal their sentences. The court handed down sentences ranging from three to 15 years' term for the 50 men — found guilty of rape, attempted rape and sexual assault on Gisèle Pelicot in a nearly decade-long period. *—PTI*

Pak gets licence to make largest nuclear plant

ISLAMABAD, 30 DEC

Pakistan is set to construct its largest nuclear plant for electricity generation after the country's atomic energy regulatory agency issued the licence for it. The Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority (PNRA) issued the licence to build Chashma Nuclear Power Plant Unit 5 (C-5, the largest plant producing electricity through nuclear power with a capacity of 1200 MWe, according to a PNRA press release issued on Thursday. The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission applied for the licence in April of this year, along with the Preliminary Safety Assessment Report and other documents about the design and operational aspects of nuclear safety, radiation protection, emergency preparedness, waste management, and nuclear security, the Dawn newspaper reported. *—PTI*

S Korea to inspect all Boeing aircraft

The move follows authorities' efforts to identify the cause of the crash

SEOUL, 30 DEC

South Korean officials said on Monday they will conduct safety inspections of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines, as they struggle to determine what caused a plane crash that killed 179 people a day earlier.

Sunday's crash, the country's worst aviation disaster in decades, triggered an outpouring of national sympathy. Many people worry how effectively the South Korean government will handle the disaster as it grapples with a leadership vacuum following the recent successive impeachments of President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's top two officials, amid political tumult caused by Yoon's brief imposition of martial law earlier this month.

New acting President Choi Sang-mok on Monday presided over a task force meeting on the crash and instructed authorities to conduct an emergency review of the country's aircraft operation systems. Boeing 737-800 plane operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air aborted its first landing attempt for reasons that aren't immediately clear. Then, during its second landing attempt, it received a bird strike warning from the ground control center before its pilot issued a distress signal. The plane landed without its front landing gear deployed, overshot the runway, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into a fireball. Alan Price, a former chief pilot at Delta Air Lines and now a consultant, said the Boeing 737-800 is a "proven airplane" that belongs to a different class of aircraft than the Boeing 737 Max jetliner that was linked to fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

But South Korea's Transport Ministry said on Monday it plans to conduct safety inspections of all of the 101 Boeing 737-800 jetliners operated by the country's airlines as well as a broader review into safety standards at Jeju Air, which operates 39 of those planes.

Officials said they will look into whether the Muan airport's localiser — a concrete fence housing a set of antennas designed to guide aircraft safely during landings — should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact. *—PTI*

A police officer inspects Muan International Airport in South Korea, on Monday PHOTO: PTI

S KOREAN OFFICIALS SEEK WARRANT TO DETAIN YOON

SEOUL, 30 DEC

South Korean law enforcement officials requested a court warrant on Monday to detain impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol as they investigate whether his short-lived martial law decree on 3 December amounted to rebellion.

The Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, which leads a joint investigation with police and military authorities into the power grab that lasted only a few hours, confirmed it requested the warrant from the Seoul Western District Court.

They plan to question Yoon on charges of abuse of authority and orchestrating a rebellion.

The warrant request came after Yoon dodged several requests by the joint investigation team and public prosecutors to appear for questioning and also blocked searches of his offices. *—PTI*

IDF eliminates Hamas terrorists involved in 7 October massacre

GAZA, 30 DEC

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) stated the elimination of six Hamas terrorists who participated in the brutal 7 October massacre in Israel.

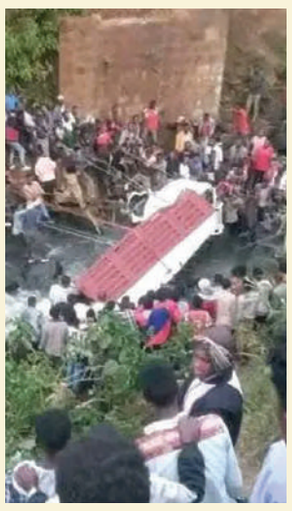
According to a post on X, joint operations by the IDF and the Israel Security Agency (ISA) in Gaza's Jabaliya and Beit Lahia areas led to the deaths of key individuals responsible for the deadly attack.

The terrorists targeted in the operation included Mohammed Abd al-Hamid Salah, Zaher Abd Rabbo Mohammed Shahab, Ali Magad Ali Ramadan, and Mohammed Hamouda.

The IDF further confirmed that Rasem Judeh, a Hamas company commander in the Jabaliya region, was also eliminated. Judeh, who played a direct role in the 7 October massacre, was killed alongside four other Hamas commanders and five additional terrorists. The operations resulted in the deaths of 14 terrorists, including six who had infiltrated Israeli territory during the 7 October assault. "IDF and ISA will continue to operate against every terrorist who participated in the brutal 7 October Massacre," the IDF stated.

In a separate update, IDF International Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani shared further insights into the operations targeting Hamas militants. He revealed that approximately 240 terrorists from Hamas and the Islamic Jihad organisations were apprehended for further investigation, while around 20 others were eliminated during the operation.

"During our precise operations in the area, approx. 20 terrorists were eliminated, and powerful explosive devices planted by the terrorists were eliminated in close-quarter combat," Shoshani said in his post. 15 terrorists were identified as having infiltrated Israel on October 7 and participated directly in the massacre. *—ANI*



The death toll, initially reported as 60, was later revised to 71, including 68 males and three females PHOTO: X

71 DEAD IN ETHIOPIA TRUCK CRASH

SIDAMA, 30 DEC

At least 71 people died in Ethiopia's Sidama region when a truck carrying passengers plunged into a river, according to regional spokesperson Wosenyeleh Simion. The accident occurred on Sunday in the Bona district, where the truck reportedly missed a bridge on a winding road.

The death toll, initially reported as 60, was later revised to 71, including 68 males and three females. Five people remain in critical condition and are receiving treatment at Bona General Hospital.

Some passengers were returning from a wedding ceremony, and several families lost multiple members in the tragedy. Traffic police in the region stated that the truck was overloaded, likely contributing to the accident.

State-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) reported that many passengers were traveling to a wedding at the time.

Deadly traffic accidents are common in Ethiopia due to poor driving standards and poorly maintained vehicles. In 2018, at least 38 people, mostly students, were killed when a bus plunged into a ravine in northern Ethiopia. This latest incident highlights the pressing need for improved road safety and enforcement of regulations to prevent such tragedies. *—Agencies*

Taliban to close all NGOs employing Afghan women

They have already barred women from many jobs and most public spaces, and also excluded them from education beyond sixth grade PHOTO: PTI

KABUL, 30 DEC

The Taliban say they will close all national and foreign nongovernmental groups in Afghanistan employing women. It comes two years after they told NGOs to suspend the employment of Afghan women, allegedly because they didn't wear the Islamic headscarf correctly.

In a letter published on X Sunday night, the Economy Ministry warned that failure to comply with the latest order would lead to NGOs losing their license to operate in Afghanistan.

The ministry said it was responsible for the registration, coordination, leadership and supervision of all activities carried out by national and foreign organisations.

The government was once again ordering the stoppage of all female work in institutions not controlled by the Taliban, according to the letter.

"In case of lack of cooperation, all activities of that institution will be cancelled and the activity license of that institution, granted by the ministry, will also be cancelled."

It's the Taliban's latest attempt to control or intervene in NGO activity.

Earlier this month, the UN Security Council heard that an increasing proportion of female Afghan humanitarian workers were prevented from doing their work even though relief work remains essential.

According to Tom Fletcher, a senior UN official, the proportion of humanitarian organisations reporting that their female or male staff were stopped by the Taliban's morality police has also increased. Taliban deny they are stopping aid agencies from carrying out their work or interfering with their activities.

They have already barred women from many jobs and most public spaces, and also excluded them from education beyond sixth grade. *—PTI*

4 KILLED AS STORMS SPAWN TORNADOES IN US

HOUSTON, 30 DEC

A severe storm system wreaked havoc across the southern United States over the weekend, resulting in at least four fatalities and considerable damage. Meteorologist Brian Hurley reported over 45 tornado-related damage reports spanning Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Crews are set to conduct assessments to confirm the tornadoes.

In the Houston area, the National Weather Service confirmed at least five tornadoes struck, with one victim, a 48-year-old woman, found near her home in Liverpool. Montgomery County officials noted that around 30 homes were destroyed.

North Carolina also reported a death when a tree fell on a truck in Statesville, while two fatalities were confirmed in Mississippi, including an 18-year-old in Natchez.

Damage included roofs ripped from buildings in Alabama's Athens, where large air conditioning units were dislodged. More than 40,000 were without power, particularly in Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, and North Carolina. Roads in western North Carolina faced closures due to high winds, exacerbating challenges following recent hurricane damage. *—PTI*

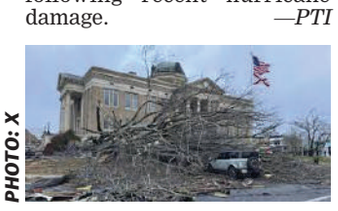


PHOTO: X

Post Assad's exit, Syria's long ruling Baath party faces collapse

DAMASCUS, 30 DEC

A few days after insurgents in Syria overthrew President Bashar Assad, his ruling Baath party announced it was freezing its activities, marking a stunning change in fortunes for the political group that had ruled for more than six decades.

Many members of the party's leadership have gone into hiding and some have fled the country. In a symbolic move, Syria's new rulers have turned the former party headquarters in Damascus into a center where former members of the army and security forces line up to register their names and hand over their weapons.

Calls are on the rise to officially dissolve the Arab Socialist Baath Party that had ruled Syria since 1963.

Many Syrians — including former party members — say its rule damaged relations with other Arab countries and aided in the spread of corruption that brought the war-torn nation to its knees.

An official with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, or HTS, the group that led the insurgent offensive that overthrew Assad, said no official decision has been made on what to do with the Baath party.

The official noted that HTS leader Ahmad al-Sharaa has said that officials who committed crimes against Syria will be brought to justice and hinted that they include party members. *—PTI*

Syrians gather for a demonstration to celebrate the ousting of Bashar Assad's government PHOTO: PTI

Shehbaz criticised for not condoling Singh

LAHORE, 30 DEC

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's decision of not offering condolences on the passing of former India premier Manmohan Singh was severely criticised on social media.

Singh, who was born in Gah village in Chakwal district of Pakistan's Punjab and served as prime minister from 2004 to 2014, died in New Delhi last Thursday aged 92.

While condolence messages poured in from around the world, neither Shehbaz Sharif nor his elder brother and three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif chose to offer any words on his demise.

Ironically, only Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar offered his condolences.

Contrary to this, Shehbaz Sharif and other top functionaries of the Pakistan government wasted no time to offer condolences on the passing of former US president Jimmy Carter. "Neither Shahbaz nor Nawaz Sharif have yet offered a public condolence on the loss of Manmohan Singh. There was a message from Ishaq Dar. Still, it's perplexing. They were contemporaries, had some similar economic views, and shared a desire for better India-Pakistan relations," Wilson Centre South Asia Institute Director Michael Kugelman said on X on Sunday. *—PTI*

1 OCT 1924 - 29 DEC 2024

Carter, only prez whose foreign policy fame grew post-office

ATLANTA, 30 DEC

In December 1978, Jimmy Carter – who has died aged 100 – outlined his belief that American strategic decisions abroad should be shaped by an adherence to human rights. "Human rights are the soul of our foreign policy ... because human rights are the soul of our sense of nationhood."

In the sphere of foreign affairs, Jimmy Carter's one term as US president (1977-1981) had some notable achievements. The most significant was the 1978 Camp David accords. Carter, Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, and Egyptian president Anwar Sadat signed an agreement that saw Begin agree to relinquish the entire Sinai Peninsula, captured by Israel in the 1967 six-day war, in exchange for peace and full diplomatic relations with Egypt.

This exemplified Carter's belief in the power of American diplomacy and why US presidents should courageously assume the difficult task of peace-making.

Twenty-five years later, and against the backdrop of the build-up to the second Gulf war, Carter was recognised for his role in the accords and awarded the 2002 Nobel peace prize. The Nobel committee said that while president George W Bush was planning an invasion of Iraq: "former president Jimmy Carter was awarded the Peace Prize for undertaking peace negotiations, campaigning for human rights, and working for social welfare".

On leaving office in January 1981, he established the Carter Center to pursue his own course of personal diplomacy. Starting in 1982, the centre has monitored more than 110 elections in 39 countries.

Ahead of the 2020 US presidential election and as then president Donald Trump on refused to commit to a peaceful transition should he lose, the Carter Center took the step of designating the US as a "backsliding" democracy. In the early 1990s he became involved in mediation work between the US State Department and several rogue states including North Korea and Libya. In 1994, Carter supported the US diplomatic efforts to resolve an increasingly tense nuclear weapons' situation with North Korean leader Kim Il Sung. Carter met with Kim in June 1994, becoming the first former US president to visit the country. The trip laid the groundwork for a bilateral deal. The agreement saw North Korea pledge to freeze its plutonium weapons programme, while the US agreed to offer aid.

One of Carter's major accomplishments since leaving office was his centre's work in health care, and specifically the eradication of Guinea-worm disease. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold rises ₹150, silver rules flat

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Gold prices rose Rs 150 to Rs 79,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Traders said the potential for upside appears to be limited for gold in the short term, as the market participants are primarily focused on Trump's tariff measures and economic policy, which could determine the direction of the metal next year. The precious metal settled at Rs 79,200 per 10 grams in the previous trading session on Friday. However, silver traded flat at Rs 91,700 per kg on Monday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 150 to Rs 78,950 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 78,800 per 10 grams on Friday. *—PTI*

India probes duty on Vietnam's chemical imports

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

India has initiated a countervailing duty probe into increased imports of a chemical - Calcium Carbonate Filler Masterbatch - used in the plastic industry, from Vietnam following a complaint from domestic players. The move is aimed at guarding domestic manufacturers from the increase in imports that are subsidised by Vietnam. The investigation has been initiated by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), an arm of the commerce ministry. India has already imposed countervailing duty as well as anti-dumping duties on various kinds of steel from countries like China to protect domestic players, which are facing problems. Vietnam is a key trading partner of India in the ASEAN bloc. *—PTI*

No irregularities in agri-scientists' appointment: ICAR

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The government's premier agri-research body ICAR on Monday rejected allegations of irregularities in the appointment process of agricultural scientists and the IARI Director position, stating these claims are "factually incorrect" and "misleading". Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) emphasised that all the recent recruitments followed approved qualification guidelines. This statement comes after Venugopal Badaravada, an ICAR Governing Body member, had requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to investigate the recruitment process, particularly regarding the recent Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) Director appointment. *—PTI*

SPPL aims for 1M TV sales in 2025, boosts capacity

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Super Plastronics Pvt Ltd (SPPL), a TV and home appliances manufacturing company having licenses of several global brands for the Indian market, targets to cross the mark of one million units of TV sales in 2025, helped by capacity enhancement, expansion of portfolio and increasing presence in offline channels, said director and CEO Avneet Singh Marwah. The Noida-based company, which has a portfolio of global brands including, Thomson, Kodak, Blaupunkt, White-Westinghouse and White-Westinghouse (Trademark of Electrolux), plans to add licensing rights for two more global brands in the Indian market. Besides, it also plans to enter into new categories like refrigerators and expand its play in appliances, including washing machines, coolers, and more. *—PTI*

Mkts dip as foreign fund outflows persist

Sensex tumbles 450.94 pts to settle at 78,248.13

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

Benchmark Sensex dropped by nearly 451 points on Monday amid unabated foreign fund outflows, weak trends in the global markets and selling in blue-chip stocks.

In a day marked with volatility, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 450.94 points or 0.57 per cent to settle at 78,248.13. During the day, it tanked 621.94 points or 0.79 per cent to 78,077.13.

The NSE Nifty declined 168.50 points or 0.71 per cent to 23,644.90.

From the 30 blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Titan, Tata Steel, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, ICICI Bank, Maruti, HDFC Bank and Infosys were among the biggest laggards.

Zomato, Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,323.29 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

NSE Nifty declines 168.50 points or 0.71 per cent to 23,644.90 PHOTO: PTI

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended higher.

European markets were trading lower. US markets ended in the negative territory on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.05 per cent to USD 74.13 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark gained 226.59 points or 0.29 per cent to settle at 78,699.07 on Friday.

The Nifty rose by 63.20 points or 0.27 per cent to 23,813.40. *PTI*

Rupee falls 4 paise to close at 85.52

Mumbai, 30 Dec

The rupee dropped 4 paise to 85.52 (provisional) against the US dollar in early trade on Monday, as dollar demand from importers, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the rupee witnessed heavy volatility on Friday as well on Monday amid significant dollar demand linked to the expiry of December currency futures and maturing positions in the outstanding forwards. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note and witnessed an intra-day low of 85.59 and a high of 85.43 against the American currency. *—PTI*

MAJOR DEAL SINCE INDICTMENT

Adani to exit Adani Wilmar, raise over $2B

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group on Monday announced its exit from FMCG joint venture Adani Wilmar by selling its entire stake to the Singaporean partner and in the open market for an estimated over USD 2 billion in a first major deal since the US bribery indictment.

In a statement, Adani Enterprises Ltd -- which held 43.94 per cent stake in Fortune brand cooking oil, wheat flour and other food product maker Adani Wilmar Ltd -- said it will sell 31.06 per cent stake to Wilmar International. About 13 per cent will be sold in the open market to meet minimum public shareholding requirements.

Adani will sell a 31.06 per cent stake to Wilmar for Rs 12,314 crore (share price of no more than Rs 305 apiece). Adding the share sale through OFS, the total proceeds will exceed USD 2 billion (about Rs 17,100 crore).

The transaction is expected to conclude before 31 March, 2025.

Proceeds from the stake sale will be used to turbocharge the growth of AEL in core infrastructure businesses. *—PTI*

India set for FII surge as corporate profits soar

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

India is poised to witness a surge in Foreign Institutional Investor (FII) inflows in FY26, as corporate profit to GDP is projected to hit its peak in FY26-FY27, according to a report by Sharekhan, a financial services company.

The report highlights a remarkable increase in corporate profits over recent years, driven by favourable economic conditions.

The data highlighted that corporate profits, which stood at Rs 3.53 trillion in FY20, are expected to rise sharply to Rs 15.38 trillion by FY25 and further to Rs 20.84 trillion by FY27. This represents a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 29 per cent since FY20, marking a 5.9x growth over seven years.

By FY27, corporate profit to GDP is expected to climb to 5.3 per cent, a significant indicator of economic health. This growth, coupled with India's robust economic performance, is anticipated to attract strong FII inflows into Indian equities, boosting the stock market.

The report also noted that India's economy continues to outperform its global peers, including China, as reflected in the Emerging Market (EM) MSCI index. The report emphasized India's premium position due to its consistent and best-in-class growth rate globally.

However, the report noted that export-driven sectors like textiles, garments, IT, and pharmaceuticals are likely to outperform benchmark indices in 2025 due to tactical positioning and global market dynamics. *—ANI*

Sitharaman holds 5th pre-budget meeting

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

As part of the preparations for the upcoming Union Budget 2025–26, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chaired the fifth Pre-Budget Consultation with industry representatives in New Delhi on Saturday.

Senior officials including the Finance Secretary, the Secretary of the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management and secretaries from the Department of Economic Affairs and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, were present at the meeting. Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of India also participated, providing economic insights to guide the discussions.

These consultations are an essential step in shaping a budget that fosters economic growth, supports industries and addresses the needs of diverse stakeholders.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman chaired the fifth pre-Budget consultation with industry representatives in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Meanwhile, the FICCI urged the government to consider increasing capex by 15 per cent in FY26 to maintain growth momentum amidst global uncertainties. Investment in physical, social, and digital infrastructure is essential for driving economic progress and ensuring balanced growth, the Industry body said.

The real estate industry is also looking at the upcoming Budget for favourable economic conditions as new home sales declined in 2024 after a sharp rise in housing prices and elevated borrowing costs ruined buyers' appetite.

India's residential real estate market, estimated to be valued at over USD 300B, faced a marginal 4 per cent drop in sales volumes during 2024, revealed data from consultant firm Anarock. After a 47 per cent decline in 2020, housing sales had grown by 71 per cent, 54 per cent and 31 per cent in 2021, 2022 and 2023. *—PTI/ANI*

Tea industry sees production fall amid rise in exports in 2024

KOLKATA, 30 DEC

The tea industry is likely to witness a fall in total production by over 100M kg this year due to erratic weather conditions coupled with early annual closure of gardens, resulting in an increase in cost per kg for planters, stakeholders said on Monday.

However, the silver lining this year was better price realisation and growing exports.

As compared to around 1,178M kg output during the first 10 months of 2023, the country produced around 1,112M kg of tea in the January–October period, while exports were expected to touch 240–250M kg in 2024, up from around 231M kg in the previous year, they said.

The production is down by around 66M kg during the January–October period in 2024, while a dip in production is expected by another 45–50M kg as plucking has been stopped after November, Indian Tea Association chairman Hemant Bangur said.

The production is down by around 66M kg during the January–October period in 2024 PHOTO: FREEPIK

Despite geo-political challenges and currency issues, India's tea exports were healthy and the rise in shipment was due to a high-risk appetite of merchants, Indian Tea Exporters Association chairman Anshuman said.

The industry was in the red in 2023, and the situation now is better than last year but the industry is not out of the doldrums," Bangur said. *—PTI*

'GOLD MARKET TO EXTEND IN 2025 ON CRISIS HEDGE'

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The gold market remained upbeat throughout the year 2024, accumulating handsome gains for the yellow metal investors, and it is expected that the precious metal will shine going into the New Year.

Gold logged about 27 per cent returns in 2024, publicly available data showed.

MUFG Bank, Japan's largest bank and one of the world's largest, in a report, asserted that the bull run in gold will continue through 2025. It attributed two key reasons -- hedging against geopolitical risks and central bank demand in emerging markets.

Central banks around the world shored up their gold reserves amid uncertainties that emanated from the ongoing geopolitical uncertainties. Gold is always considered a safe investment bet. *—ANI*

₹582 CRORE IPO

Senores Pharma shares surge over 53% on debut

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

Shares of Senores Pharmaceuticals Ltd on Monday listed with a premium of over 53 per cent against the issue price of Rs 391.

The stock made its debut at Rs 593.70, rallying 51.84 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. Later, it jumped 55.75 per cent to Rs 609. At the NSE, it listed at Rs 600, reflecting a premium of 53.45 per cent. The company's market valuation stood at Rs 2,657.29 crore.

The Rs 582-crore initial public offering (IPO) of Senores Pharmaceuticals Ltd received 93.69 times subscription on the final day of bidding on Tuesday amid strong investors' participation. The initial share sale had a price range of Rs 372-391 per share.

The Ahmedabad-based company's IPO had a combination of fresh issuance of shares worth Rs 500 crore and an Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of up to 21 lakh shares valued Rs 82.11 crore, by promoters and other selling shareholders, at the upper-end of the price band.

PHOTO: PTI

Senores Pharmaceuticals specialises in identifying, developing, and manufacturing a wide array of specialty, underserved, and complex pharmaceutical products, positioning itself as a preferred partner for customers.

As of March 2024, the company had three R&D facilities in India and the US and is in the process of consolidating R&D facilities into one dedicated facility in Ahmedabad. *—PTI*

AI, automation to lead retail industry in 2025

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

With the rapid evolution of channels like quick-commerce and the emergence of ONDC, the Indian retail industry is "cautiously optimistic" for 2025, as new-age technologies such as AI and automation are expected to play a crucial role, driving efficiency and personalisation in 2025.

The new year could be a period of transformation for the Indian retail industry, one of the fastest-growing globally, where the contemporary retail landscape is rapidly evolving, influenced by the preferences of digital-first generation Gen-Z and retail tech.

Helped by tailwinds such as rising disposable income, rapid urbanisation, the rise of non-metro tier II cities and growing middle class along with a digitally-savvy consumer base, the organised retail sector is poised to grow.

"FY25 is likely to see continued focus on building supply chain efficiencies, along with upgrades to logistics hubs and tracking systems to meet fast delivery demands. Employment generation in quick commerce, logistics and related sectors is also expected to continue," said EY India Tax Leader for Retail Paresh Parekh.

Indian consumers, influenced by global exposure and digital technologies, are prioritising higher quality and value for money. This created a shift in spending from luxuries to essentials or more options.

"Despite these challenges, the outlook for 2025 remains positive, driven by demographic trends, urbanisation, digital growth and the aspirations of a young, dynamic middle class," he said. *—PTI*

BIG AI BETS

Indian IT eyes 2025 with cautious optimism

NEW DELHI, 30 DEC

The Indian IT industry steps into 2025 with hope and optimism of improved tech spending and stronger deal pipeline as businesses across-the-board take bold AI bets, but all eyes are on global macroeconomic cues as well as the US' stance on trade and high-skilled immigration as President-elect Donald Trump returns to White House next month.

With Q2 report card of most IT heavyweights fuelling hopes of an improved client demand over the coming quarters - industry pundits predict a notable rebound in growth and profitability metrics materialising by late 2025 or the second half of FY26, if all goes well.

Experts also expect tech M&A counters to buzz right through 2025, with big data, cloud and Gen AI (Generative AI) acting as major draws for companies with takeover appetites. Meanwhile, the IPO market- heady from 2024 highs - seems all primed up for yet another blockbuster year as a slew of tech startups are readying for a market debut to capitalise on euphoria.

After creating a stir in 2024, Generative AI is now at a 'transformative inflection point' PHOTO: FREEPIK

After creating a stir in 2024, Generative AI is now at a "transformative inflection point" and poised to redefine industries and fuel global innovation.

While tech sector is broadening its services to include GenAI-powered analytics, intelligent automation, and personalised customer experiences, the non-tech sectors are expected to face significant disruption, with GenAI transforming marketing, operations, R&D and other operations.

Following in the footsteps of Swiggy and FirstCry, startups such as Zepto, Bluestone, Ecom Express, PhysicsWallah, InCred Finance, Ola (mobility), PayU, Ather, boAt, Pine Labs, are reportedly eyeing a public issue.

Indian startups took on the might of tech world goliaths like Google, who also came under increased scrutiny from competition watchdog. *—PTI*

India slumps to a demoralising 184-run loss with contemporary greats Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli failing to come good yet again; Australian players celebrate after winning the fourth Test cricket match against India at Melbourne Cricket Ground, Melbourne **PHOTO: PTI**

Rohit & Virat fail again as India lose 4th Test against Australia

India must level in Sydney to stay in World Test Championship final race

MELBOURNE, 30 DEC

India slumped to a demoralising 184-run loss to Australia in the fourth Test here on Monday with contemporary greats Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli failing to come good yet again, signalling that their walk towards the exit door is not too far.

Chasing a near improbable target of 340, both Rohit (9 off 40 balls) and Kohli (5) failed to battle their technical frailties and mental cobwebs as India lost seven wickets for 34 runs in just 20.4 overs in the final session to be all out for 155 in 79.1 overs.

Australian captain Pat Cummins (3/28 in 18 overs) was superb as usual and Scott Boland was also magnificent (3/39 in 16 overs) in his every spell.

Nathan Lyon (2/37 in 20.1 overs) took advantage of variable bounce while Mitchell Starc (1/25 in 16 overs) got the prized scalp of Kohli.

This was after an 88-run fourth-wicket stand between Yashasvi Jasiwal and Rishabh Pant.

Australia now lead the series 2-1 and unless India draw level in Sydney, a third successive

- As for Kohli, despite all his white-ball exploits, the problems outside the off-stump will stick out like a sore thumb

World Test Championship final could become a distant dream. Even to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, India would need to post a win.

Save Jaiswal (84, 208 balls), whose controversial caught-behind in which the third umpire overruled technology to adjudge him out, none of the other batters performed well enough to save the team.

The art of saving Test matches has slowly become extinct but India would have depended on their two senior-most players, who are also fighting to save their legacy and reputation built over nearly two decades.

In case of Rishabh Pant, it was one bad shot too many after a full session in which he concentrated. He got a rank long hop from Travis Head but after a 103-ball vigil, it all came to a naught.

Even Jaiswal's guts and grit couldn't prevent a once highly-rated, but currently a trifle over-rated, Indian batting line-up from implosion with over-the-hill seniors and young superstars unable to handle the pressure.

As for Kohli, despite all his white-ball exploits, the problems outside the off-stump will stick out like a sore thumb.

For Rohit, his ultra-defensive approach in the opening slot, is causing India to stare down the barrel with alarming regularity. *—PTI*

Virat Kohli and Indian Captain Rohit Sharma **PHOTO: X**

'Kohli can continue, Rohit must decide'

MELBOURNE, 30 DEC

Former India coach Ravi Shastri believes that Virat Kohli still has 3-4 years of cricket left in him, but skipper Rohit Sharma may need to assess his future after the ongoing series against Australia, considering his prolonged struggle with form and technique in the traditional format of the game.

Kohli, despite a hundred in the Perth Test, has struggled with consistency, scoring 5, 100 not out, 7, 11, 3, 36, and 5 in the series so far. *—PTI*

Rohit and Kohli have not really made the contribution that they should have
-Sunil Gavaskar, Ex-cricketer

Bumrah showed Konstas what Test cricket is all about
-Simon Katich, Former Australian opener

Look Rishabh Pant, he needs to understand what is required of him
-Rohit Sharma, Captain

I mean, Sam Kontas is mad. I think he really enjoyed himself under the lid there
-Steve Smith

No one has complete confidence in ultra-edge, but Jaiswal hit it
-Pat Cummins, Australian skipper

Mentally disturbing, need to reflect: Rohit

MELBOURNE, 30 DEC

India skipper Rohit Sharma looked shattered as he confessed to being "disturbed" after the heavy loss to Australia in the fourth Test here, saying there are "things" that he needs to address at a personal level apart from the team's collective problems amid intense focus on his form.

With 31 runs in six innings across three Tests, the Indian skipper's tally is just one more than Jasprit Bumrah's series wicket-haul of 30. The clamour for Test retirement have reached a crescendo and Sydney could be his final port of call in whites but he doesn't want to go out without a fight.

Where does he stand as a batter and as a captain? What is his frame of mind? The questions are many but the answers are not so simple.

"I stand where I am standing today. There is nothing to think about what has happened in the past. Obviously, few results have not gone our way. As a captain, yes, that is disappointing," he tried to conceal his disappointment after the 184-run defeat but then revealed what has become obvious. He is not in a happy place.

His pace spearhead Bumrah has bowled more than 140 overs (141.2 overs) across four Tests for his 30 scalps and the captain had to agree that he is bowling a lot more than he ideally should.

"To be honest, he's bowled a lot of overs. There's no doubt about it. But again, every Test match we play, we keep that in mind, you know, the workloads of all the bowlers. *—PTI*

Bumrah nominated for ICC Cricketer of the Year award

DUBAI, 30 DEC

Operating at a level rarely seen in the game before, India's peerless fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah was on Monday nominated for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year award and also featured in the list for the best player in the Test format. Bumrah, who has left the Australian batters scrambling for survival with his incredible display of fast bowling in the ongoing five-match series Down Under, has been nominated for the top award, named after legendary West Indies all-rounder Sir Garfield Sobers, alongside England's prolific duo of Joe Root and Harry Brook. *—PTI*

No Indian among nominees for ICC Women's Cricketer of Year

No Indian player features among the nominees for the ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year award which has Sri Lanka skipper Chamari Athapaththu and New Zealand's Amelia Kerr, among others.

The other two players nominated for the honour are Australia's Annabel Sutherland and South Africa captain Laura Wolvaardt. "Sri Lanka's all-format captain has been producing the goods with the bat for a long time now for her country. Athapaththu is ranked among the top-10 players in the ICC Women's rankings for batters and all-rounders in ODIs as well as T20Is, proving her mettle with both bat and ball," said ICC. *—PTI*

Ethiopia's Berhanu, Minsewo to defend Mumbai titles

MUMBAI, 30 DEC

The famed Ethiopian long-distance runners, led by reigning champions Hayle Lemi Berhanu and Aberash Minsewo, will return to defend their titles when the Tata Mumbai Marathon is held in the city on January 19 next year. Berhanu would be eyeing a hat-trick after back-to-back victories in 2023 and 2024, something which would make him the first runner to achieve the honour in the history of the race. Kenya's John Kelai, winner in 2007 and 2008, made an attempt earlier but managed a third place in 2009. *—PTI*

Bengal, Kerala clash in Santosh Trophy final

HYDERABAD, 30 DEC

West Bengal and Kerala, two of India's finest teams with a rich history in the game, will clash in a blockbuster summit showdown of the National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy here on Tuesday. The two states that have rightfully earned the tags of Indian football hubs are no strangers to the pinnacle of the national championships with West Bengal gearing up for a record 47th final and Kerala standing on the verge of playing their 16th summit clash. Both sides have shown form befitting of their stature in the tournament. *—PTI*

NZ beats SL by 45 runs in 2nd T20

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, 30 DEC

Sri Lanka again fell short in a tough run chase as New Zealand won the second Twenty20 international by 45 runs Monday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

The tourists were edged by eight runs chasing 172-8 in the first match two days ago and again faltered late while chasing New Zealand's 186-5 on Monday. Sri Lanka was all out for 141 in 19.1 overs.

"It's really important to finish the game, no matter how it started," Sri Lanka captain Charith Asalanka said.

"The way you finish is the most important thing. In the first game we were almost there to win and again we're disappointed."

Once again, Jacob Duffy was New Zealand's key bowler, dismissing opener Pathum Nissanka for 37 and returning to remove Kusal Perera for 48 when both batters looked well placed to steer Sri Lanka to victory.

Nissanka made 96 in the first match in a 120-run opening partnership with Kusal Mendis before Duffy turned that match in New Zealand's favor when he took three wickets in four balls, including Mendis, to stifle the Sri Lanka chase.

New Zealand depended on a century partnership between Daryl Mitchell and Michael Bracewell to post a competitive total in the first match. It produced a more balanced batting effort Monday to reach a testing total on a tricky pitch which sometimes skidded, sometimes held up.

A strong wind across the Bay Oval also made hitting to one side of the ground difficult and gave an edge to bowlers. *—PTI*

POST INJURY COMEBACK

Osaka wins first match of season

WELLINGTON, 30 DEC

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka marked her return to competitive tennis with a victory on Monday at the ASB Classic in Auckland. This was her first match since October, following a back injury that curtailed her 2024 season.

Osaka faced off against qualifier Lina Glushko and emerged triumphant, winning 6-4, 6-4 in a closely contested encounter. Despite the swirling winds on centre court and protests outside the stadium regarding her Israeli opponent, Osaka remained focused. The match was intermittently interrupted by chants from a small group of demonstrators, with a particularly lengthy delay occurring when Glushko sought treatment for a hip injury while Osaka was poised to serve for the first set.

With support from her new coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, , Osaka demonstrated all her trademark skills. *—PTI*

WORLD BLITZ CHAMPIONSHIP

Koneru Humpy eyes Blitz Title after Rapid win

NEW YORK, 30 DEC

Indian chess star Koneru Humpy, fresh from her remarkable victory in the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess Championship, is setting her sights on a double title as the World Blitz Championship begins on Tuesday. Humpy's success followed a decisive win against Indonesia's Irene Sukandar, marking her second World Rapid title; she previously claimed it in 2019, becoming only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to achieve the feat twice.

The Blitz Championship offers a prize of USD 60,000

Koneru Humpy **PHOTO: X**

(approximately Rs 50 lakhs), matching the generous purse of the Rapid event, adding to the stakes for the competitors. The tournament will feature 13 rounds in the Open category and 11 in the women's section.

Among the strong Indian contingent, Dronavalli Harika is a key player in the Blitz format, while fans will be eager to see improved performances from R Vaishali and Divya Deshmukh, who struggled in the Rapid event.

In the Open section, World Champion Magnus Carlsen, who faced disqualification in the Rapid event over a dress code issue, is the clear favourite.

However, he will face stiff competition from India's R Praggnanandhaa, Arjun Erigaisi, France's Alireza Firouzja, and Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattorov, all of whom possess the ability to challenge the Norwegian. *—PTI*

Carlsen returns to Blitz as FIDE allows jeans

NEW YORK, 30 DEC

World number one Magnus Carlsen will return to the World Blitz Chess Championship after FIDE revised its dress code policy. The change comes just days after Carlsen was disqualified from the Rapid Championship for wearing jeans, which were deemed "explicitly prohibited" under the tournament rules.

The five-time world champion faced a fine of USD 200 and was asked to change into formal trousers by chief arbiter Alex Holowczak. FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich announced the new policy, which allows "elegant minor

Magnus Carlsen **PHOTO: PTI**

deviations" from the strict dress code, including appropriate jeans paired with jackets.

Following his disqualification, Carlsen had initially opted out of the Blitz section. However, FIDE confirmed his participation, stating, "We are delighted that the reigning World Blitz Chess Champion will be competing to defend his title at this highly anticipated event in New York."

Carlsen expressed his decision to join the competition after productive discussions with Dvorkovich and sponsor Turlov. "I am playing at least one more day here in New York," he said. "If I do well, another day after that."

FIDE's deputy president, Viswanathan Anand, commented that the governing body did not wish to disqualify Carlsen but felt compelled to enforce the rules when he refused to comply. Carlsen's return is expected to greatly benefit. *—PTI*